

**ERITREA'S COURSE OF ACTION IN THE CURRENT REGIONAL DISPUTE:
EMBODIMENT OF NATIONAL INTEREST OR FOREIGN INTEREST?**

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Our people inside and outside the country wake up every morning intensely absorbed in serious worries, and anxious to know what Atse Isias has done to the country while they were asleep. Did he start a new war with a neighbouring country? Did he lease a territory or the borders of the country to a foreign power or foreign powers? Did he send their kids as mercenaries to another country to be the cannon fodder for a cause that has no meaning to them but enriches his political fortune and wealth? Did he arrest or physically liquidate their relatives, friends, neighbours, acquaintances or other citizens? Did he come up with new spontaneous "laws" that would increase the miseries and misfortunes of the people and worsen their livelihood burden? Did he release new wolves from his animal park to prey on the people, giving them the license to do whatever they like and the blank cheque to rob the national wealth? These are among the many questions that haunt our people on a daily basis.

It was in the middle of this horrible nightmare that foreign media and intelligence sources started talking about the amassment of Egyptian and Emerite troops, in addition to Ethiopian and Sudanese opposition fighters, armed to the teeth with modern weapons, tanks, fighter planes, and all military equipment, at Sawa, which is at the Sudanese border. Immediately, other reports went viral that the Sudanese government closed the borders with Eritrea, declaring the state of emergency in Kassala and amassing its troops at the borders with Eritrea, confirming that they were ready to repel any attack. All these fast developments took place during the first week of the New Year that coincided with the Ethiopian/Eritrean Christmas holidays. Unless one is naïve he/she would ask: ***Why did these developments take place during the holiday week? Was that timing a coincidence or calculated by design? What does this say about the rule of the junta and its disrespect to the feelings of the Eritrean people?***

The intent behind this piece is not to show who did what to escalate the current tension between Ethiopia and the Sudan on one hand, and Egypt and Eritrea, with Gulf governments acting behind the scene, as the driving force and financiers of all hostile activities, on the other. It is rather to discover whether the course of action

the Eritrean dictator has taken in relation to the dispute embodies the Eritrean national interest or the interest of foreign powers. But before we go that far, it is imperative to display the background of the problem.

The developments raised above unfolded after a major geopolitical crisis erupted on who should control the Nile water: Ethiopia or Egypt. The problem was triggered by the advanced progress of the construction of the \$ 4.8 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), whose name many of us tremendously loved as a ray of hope to alleviate poverty in our region. The dam started in 2011 and about 63% of the work is believed to have been completed by now. Particularly, Ethiopia is working day and night to start the production of electricity and complete the remaining phases of the project. This would make it important to see quickly: *Why is this dam significant?*

With the completion of the dam, Ethiopia will produce over 6000.00 Megawatts of electricity, becoming the biggest exporter in Africa. In few words, it means that the dam is vital for Ethiopia because it would boost its economic growth and enable it to export the surplus to the neighbouring countries, and by doing so support their development plans, though it is unfortunate that Atse Isias's Eritrea is not among the beneficiaries, for reasons known to all. This will lead us to the questions: *What is the Ethio-Egyptian row all about? How about the Egyptian-Sudanese row?*

In general, it could be said that Egypt did not agree on the project from the very beginning and did a lot of attempts to sabotage it by using international lobbies, all types of foreign pressure and subtle conspiracies, in order to prevent Ethiopia from getting foreign funding that would translate its plan to reality. The question that imposes itself here is: *Why?* (Recommended source is: *Will Egypt run out of water?* article by [Mohamed Saied](#), November 30, 2017).

According to the international accords of 1929, renewed in 1959, Egypt used to get 55.5 billion cubic meters of Nile water (covering 97% of its total water needs and the remaining 3% is provided by rain and groundwater) that was the lion's share. Now it says its quota will be reduced due to evaporation from the reservoir, while the Ethiopians say it will not. At the same time, Egypt utilized

the unused amount from the Sudanese quota because the Sudan did not have a dam to store what it could not immediately use. Now the Sudan can keep the amount that flew to Egypt from its quota stored at this dam, to use it any time it needs in future. Due to these concerns, Egypt wants to be a part of the technical administration of the dam and have a decisive say on how it should work without affecting its interest (A good read is: ***Identity, Conflict and Cooperation in International Systems***, a book by Jack Kalpakian). Today, we hear threats, bullying and political pressure practiced from the Egyptian side to make Ethiopia succumb to their demands for getting more concessions, while we know things will not work that way. On the contrary, we believe negotiations and mediations through friends and their common church would be effective tools.

It is obvious that the Sudan would benefit from the dam water and at the same time from the cheap electricity it would produce, as it is true with Egypt too. These reasons made the Sudan stand by the side of the Ethiopians in negotiations, and that made Egypt lonely in its opposition to the construction of the dam, for reasons of its own greed, bias, and conceit. Another component of the Sudanese-Egyptian disagreement that further complicated their relations is a border dispute over Shalateen and Halaib (formerly parts of the Sudanese Red Sea Province), occupied by the Egyptian forces in 1995. Moreover, there is another important factor that made the Sudanese-Egyptian relations deteriorate further, constituting the latest tension between the two countries. That is the visit of the Turkish President, Erdogan, to the Sudan, and the signing of an agreement concerning the temporary lease of the Red Sea island of Suakin, which faces the Saudi port of Jeddah on the Red Sea. Consequently, the presence of Turkey in Suakin, which was historically the naval base for the Ottoman Turks in the 19th century, was seen as a military threat by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Nonetheless, when the Sudan was a British colony (almost 200 years from now), the port was moved from Suakin to Port Sudan and since then Suakin was totally deserted and there was no life and development there whatsoever. As a matter of fact, it was easier for the Gulf governments, who have the petrodollar, to develop and use it as a port when it was wasting for two solid centuries. ***Why did they see its importance after it has been***

handed over to the Turks? Is the problem of security or political nature? Doesn't the Sudan have the right to make agreements with any other government concerning the use of its land? Why did the visit of Erdogan to the Sudan cause that much Arab uproar?

It should be noted here that the Turkish ruling party is ideologically related to the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members it still hosts since they fled from Egypt as a result of the counter-revolutionary coup of Butcher SiSi. Turkey is also the ally of Qatar, in whose land it immediately stationed its troops when the anti-Qatar Gulf blockade started, less than a year ago. The fact that Turkey also has a military base in Somalia should have added the Arab fear. For clarity, one would ask: ***Why are the Gulf countries after the Muslim Brotherhood?*** This is the key question behind the hostility towards Qatar, Aljazera, as the only window through which free opinions are expressed, and the present Turkey. Accordingly, the issue deserves few lines by way of clarification because its tail is long enough to see everywhere.

The Muslim Brotherhood represents the Arab Spring and its principle of rule based on elections rather than the traditional *م بايعة* or the pledge of allegiance (the basis for the rule of the Gulf dynasties) is the biggest threat to the rulers of the Gulf, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who spend billions of dollars to fight them everywhere (examples are: Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, the Sudan, Palestine, Libya, Jordan and many African countries) under the disguise of different slogans, including the fight against terrorism and religious extremism. Add to these, the reactionary Gulf governments, specially the UAE, also have been engaged in fighting the democrats everywhere on the globe, including the West, and support the conservative parties, going to the extent of financing their election campaigns and coordinating the relations between the conservative parties in different parts of the world. They did that in support of Donald Trump during the US elections of 2016, then in France in support of Marine Le Pen and her party, National Front, and other European countries. There is no reason for us to believe they will stop this. For them, it is a matter of the survival of their thrones against the democratic winds that had started blowing across the Middle East, though they could arrest their advance for the time being (Arab Spring has been wounded but not dead). All in all, it will be against the backdrop of all these complications that we will discuss the Eritrean role in the dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt.

It has never been a secret that Egyptian forces have been training and equipping fighters from the Ethiopian opposition, Genbot 7, and Eritrea has been facilitating and supporting their efforts so that they would weaken the Ethiopian government

and cause damage to the construction of the dam so that the work stops. In fact, there have been repeated reports about foiled terrorist acts supported by Eritrea and Egypt. The latest amassment of Egyptian forces, Ethiopian and Sudanese rebels, and others at the border with the Sudan was the highest form of the Eritrean-Egyptian cooperation (of course, with the support of their Gulf sponsors) to attack the Sudan, may be to topple the government, and subsequently stop the work of the dam or create a chaotic situation in Ethiopia. The result was the Ethiopian and the Sudanese prompt response by mobilizing their armies at the borders; the situation leading to an escalated tension between the three countries. All this took place in a region where there are a lot of military bases on the Red Sea and the neighbouring Middle East. In few words, Eritrea created a dangerous situation that could lead (God forbid) to a war in a region considered to be a tinder-box waiting a match.

Nevertheless, the pattern we have observed during the last 26 years suggests that Atse Isias's ability to deny reality and truth is enormous and shocking. In his New Year interview (Part I) , he called media and intelligence reports about the troop amassment in Sawa and the conspiracies he had been hatching together with the Egyptian regime and the Gulf sponsors, "fabrications". At the age of denials and "alternative facts", this is not a surprise to anyone. With this in mind, one would refer him to read [Deborah Lipstadt's](#) book, ***Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory***, which we think has overwhelming relevance for him and for all who deny every crime they commit, forgetting that they are standing naked in front of this world today.

Here we need to approach the fundamental question: ***Does the course Atse has taken help or hurt Eritrea?*** If it helps, it means it was guided by the national interest.

To answer the question above, let me first raise Allen Buchanan's view of national interest. Buchanan calls his view, the "Obligatory Exclusivity Thesis" . This thesis holds that "A state's foreign policy always ought to be determined exclusively by the national interest." (<https://christopher-parsons.com/review-of-in-the-national-interest-by-allen-buchanan/>). Here by foreign policy, he means a government's strategy in dealing with other nations or foreign circles. Specifically, dealing with the Egyptians, the Sudanese and Ethiopian rebels, implicated in the amassment of foreign troops in Sawa, is a foreign policy issue that is not in line with the national interest. From another dimension, when we talk about national interest, we have to

recognize that human rights constitute a part of that interest. In other words, the state should focus on the particular interests for its people. This means that the needs of the people should be better understood and served. If the state embarks on measures that endanger the physical and food security of its people, the measures it took do not serve the national interest. Accordingly, it is clear that Eritrea surrounded by the Ethiopian and Sudanese army will suffer the most, if war starts.

First, most of the fighting with the Ethiopian and Sudanese forces would take place in the Eritrean soil, Eritrea has the weakest, the least armed, the most undernourished, and the most dissatisfied army that would not be able to defend the country against enemy attacks. Second, as there are already-formed some alignment of forces close to be considered military alliances in the region, the situation could develop into a full-fledged war in which many countries, even from outside the region, would be involved. Third, the presence of the military base by the UAE in Assab would make Eritrea a special target. Fourth, the Eritrean people who have nothing to eat and largely depended on smuggled food from the neighbouring countries. In a situation of totally closed Ethiopian and the Sudanese borders, it would mean nothing but serious starvation and disease like those we see on the TV in Tez and other parts of Yemen. Fifth, war these days, is like a garbage can that attracts flies. Intruders who we think the war in the region is irrelevant to them (including terrorists who are in feuds with the UAE and Egypt), could slip into our territories, and it could be difficult to kick them out. They are in the Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and many Red Sea areas, and our coast line is too long to control. This is to say that Atse Isias is raising dust that reduces visibility in our borders, and playing with fire. This is really very scary.

All of the above show concrete examples that the measures taken by Atse Isias were not guided by the national interest in the sense that they did not see the needs of the people for physical and food security, and the survival of the state. Besides, they put the relations with the neighboring countries, Ethiopia and the Sudan, in serious danger. Furthermore, the actions served foreign interests of Egypt and its allies. This would clearly be deduced, as logical conclusions, from our discussions about the background of the dispute. This will lead us to the question: ***What does that mean for the ruling gang in the short run?***

The ruling gang would definitely benefit from financial, material, political, and diplomatic support it would get from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but only political and diplomatic support from Egypt, which is a subcontractor in this case,

depending on the financing of its two sponsors. However, the logic of threat as a tool to secure concessions from Ethiopia and the Sudan did not work for Eritrea's devil and his masters. On the contrary, the plan blew up in his face because now we hear about the readiness from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Sudan, to reduce the tension and resolve the problem in a negotiating table, while the media campaign seems to have subsided to a large extent. We also hear about the visit of the Ethiopian Prime Minister to Cairo on January 18, 2018. ***Is there a silver lining in the actions of Eritrea's dictator or a helpful side of the situation that seemed gloomy on the surface?*** The answer is definitely "YES". ***How?***

There is always a silver lining in every bad thing that takes place. With regard to the consequences of Atse Isias's course of action, it is clear that he has emerged from the situation as the biggest loser or the underdog. This could be summarized as follows:

- He has lost the Sudan as a partner, a good neighbor and supporter, squandering the good will that had existed in his favour. It was his only breathing space, but now he has turned it into an enemy, just to please Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and at the same time to irritate the Ethiopians who see the Sudan as a strategic partner. ***How does that affect the regime?***

The smuggling of food stuff, medicine, machinery, oil, foreign currency, building materials and other essentials, that has enabled the regime to survive, has ended now with the closure of the Sudanese border. Correspondingly, the closure could be permanent, unless the Sudanese have real difficulties in learning lessons. As a consequence, this rupture of relations with the Sudan could open a possibility for the Sudanese cooperation with the Eritrean opposition to resume, and shorten the life of the regime. Similarly, it seems Atse Isias's recent actions against the Sudan have evoked memories of the early days of the regime when the relations of the two countries deteriorated in the mid-1990s and Eritrea gave the premises of the Sudanese embassy to the Sudanese opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

- Ethiopia will emerge stronger and, hopefully, more determined to help the Eritrean struggle against the regime, which is digging a hole deeper for itself. At the same time, such conspiracies are not easily to be forgotten by the Ethiopians. The residues will take time to disappear.

- Another possible effect is that the Ethiopian and the Sudanese rebels could lose confidence in the ability of the Eritrean regime to help them topple the governments they are fighting to bring down. As they would by now find out that the wind is not at the back of Atse Isias, they hopefully conclude that having unprincipled alliance with a criminal gang, which entered the boxing ring with its people from the first day of its rule, would mean putting politics above principles.

This would lead us to two important questions: *Is the involvement of the Gulf reaction in these developments a perception or a reality? Why are the Gulf governments trying to drag our nations into their orbit?*

Any observer, who is following what the UAE has been doing in the Middle East and outside it to thwart and fight the spread of progressive and democratic ideas in any part of the world and the funds they are allocating to achieve that, would be very naïve to doubt their involvement in the side of Butcher SiSi and Atse Isias against the Sudan and Ethiopia, that allegedly have relations with Qatar and Turkey. Though we have dwelt enough on this issue above, in different references, we raise it here in the form of questions just to help the reader link the issue with other related things. The only new thing we could add here is how Atse Isias is a soft target for any government that is capable of paying.

To elaborate, Atse Isias and Butcher SiSi are cut from the same cloth or are of the same nature. First, just like the Gulf rulers, they are scared to death from democratic ideas and democratic change introduced by the Arab Spring, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and with which they associate the Sudan, Qatar, and Turkey. In fact, there is no interview the Atse has given in which he did not smear the Arab Spring. Of course, the attitude of Butcher SiSi towards the Arab Spring, is obvious, and needs no explanation. Second, the magnitude of readiness of the two to sell their conscience for money, no matter how much that would cost their countries, is extraordinary and unheard of elsewhere. The Amharic phrase, “Sai Tarout Abet, Sa Lekut Wadet”, seemed to have been coined for them in particular. Additionally, Atse Isias has one more weakness that makes him vulnerable when dirty missions are wanted by some circles, governments or organizations, no matter who they are and what they stand for. This will be explained below.

When politicians take a decision, they do so for one of the following reasons: national interest, public pressure on them, or the belief in what they are doing. Atse Isias is different. In particular, in addition to what we raised above, one big factor that determines his decision-making is the question: ***Does the measure help or harm the Wayane?*** This is the litmus paper. It does not matter to him, if he loses the most valuable thing by taking a certain measure, and no principle, value or consideration would thwart him, provided that it has the potential to harm or remove the Wayane (as he calls the TPLF) from power. I will try to explain this through a funny story I read some years ago.

The story tells that two men had a dispute and they were presented to the king to see the case and give a verdict. The king asked each one of them, if he agrees to a decision that removes one eye from each one of them. One of them showed his utter disagreement, while the one who shares a similar mentality and attitude with Atse Isias said, "As long as my opponent loses his eye, I do not mind losing mine." In reality, this is the most misguided view point, which in part, explains what is going on in our region. In short, Atse Isias is a person, who has totally lost his conscience (if at all he was born with one), and reputation means nothing to him. He never understands or cares that reputation stays longer than any person.

We have enough consciousness to stand with the legitimate rights of the peoples of Ethiopia and the Sudan to use their resources. At the same time, we support understanding and cooperation with neighbours, while we condemn foreign interference in the affairs of these states. In brief, it should be emphasized here that poverty is not enough to make us fall prey to the Gulf petrodollar or pressure and serve them as tools for their agenda. As a country, Eritrea, may not have resources equal to theirs, but our people, unlike Atse Isias, are rich in pride and dignity.

There is no doubt that the financial/material help and all necessary support the Atse could get from the Gulf reactionary regimes could add some time to the life of his dictatorship. But if he is intelligent enough, he should study what these Gulf governments finally did to others who had been their close allies. The list includes

Saad Al Hariri, the current Lebanese prime Minister, General Ahmed Shafeeq, former Egyptian presidential candidate who run against Mursie and recently wanted to run against Butcher SiSi but blocked, and the Qatari prince (remember of the ruling family), Sheik Abdalla Al Sani, whom it is believed the UAE dreamed to put on power to replace the current Amir of Qatar. In this connection, Atse Isias should be advised to watch the Arabic show in the Arab Media of January 15, 2018 entitled (translation mine): ***“Saudi Arabia and the UAE: A trap for politicians and safe haven for the corrupt”*** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MmCJ3fIX_I). =====