

***THE NEO-ANDENET GANG STILL STRUGGLING TO MAKE ERITREA A LOW-HANGING FRUIT EASY FOR ETHIOPIA'S NEO-EXPANSIONISTS TO PICK:***

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Since the day Eritrea's Atse and Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the spearhead of Ethiopia's neo-expansionist aspirations, signed the so called "peace-agreement" , followed by very controversial and crude statements, malicious relations, disturbing developments and dubious behaviours that threaten the national sovereignty of our newly-emerged nation and basic legal, ethical and constitutional norms (we do have a constitution though it is not in place but put on the shelf), the Eritrean people got the sneak peek at what the hidden motives of all that would be. With every passing day, it is becoming more and more difficult for our people to convince themselves that "History of 1940s, 1950s and 1960s is not repeating itself." To refresh our memory, these dates constituted a critical time in our people's history and the struggle for self-determination.

Nonetheless, though the dynamics of the times and the environments differ, it could be said that Abiy's moves toward Eritrea mirror those of Emperor Haile Sellasie's, whereas there are parallels between the completing roles of the NEO-ANDENET GANG, led by Atse Isias, and the ANDENET MOVEMENT of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. In this connection, for the sake of absolute fairness and objectivity, it should be made clear here that neither of the gangs represents any social, linguistic or religious segment of our society, in the same way ISIS (Daesh) represents nobody except the culprits themselves.

Though the focus of this piece is not the narration of pre-independence history of the country, it is important to cast light on two questions, namely: ***Why did Ethiopia want to annex Eritrea since 1940s? What favourable conditions enabled Ethiopia then?***

Accordingly, it is noteworthy that like any other African country, Eritrea was the result of the intervention of European colonialism. This means that the current Eritrea, as a political entity, was the result of the agreements the Italian colonial power reached with the Ethiopian Empire, the British and the French colonial powers that were at that time scrambling for the region. After the Italians left and Eritrea became a British mandate (1941-1952), a new political environment evolved in Eritrea, including the introduction of Eritrean constitution. That created a suitable atmosphere for political activities and freedoms, notably, the formation of political parties.

Making use of the political atmosphere referred to above, the Ethiopian Government campaigned that it was better for Eritreans to be a part of Ethiopia, instead of being ruled by the whites, capitalizing on their religious sentiments and lack of national awareness. The Ethiopian argument made sense to some Eritreans, who had never seen anything else except Turkish, Egyptian and finally European colonialism, and felt that Eritrea shares many things with Ethiopia: culture, religion, ethnicity, and geographical proximity. That led to the founding of the **ANDENET MOVEMENT**, which the Ethiopian authorities used as the pawn of their expansionist nationalism. Moreover, powers that came out of the WWII victorious, specially, the United States, supported Ethiopia in the UN when the issue of the fate of the former British colonies, one of them Eritrea, was presented in 1952 for determination, realizing the importance of the strategic location of Eritrea on the Red Sea.

We came this far in our discussion in order to answer the questions raised above. As to the question related to the Ethiopian interest in Eritrea then, the answer is nothing but: **ACCESS TO THE SEA**. This Ethiopian expansionist nationalism continued even after defeating the Ethiopian occupiers and Eritrea won its national independence in 1991, causing Ethiopia to be a landlocked country. This time, it continued as Ethiopian Neo-Expansionist Nationalism (we will see the definition of the term later), using the former liberation leader, Traitor Isias, as its Trojan horse. Consequently, we have the current disturbing situation: the Abiy-Isias-Gulf tripartite (involving three parties) conspiracy against the sovereignty of

Eritrea, representing Ethiopia's NEO-EXPANSIONISM, Eritrea's NEO-ANDENET GANG, and Gulf ambitions of hegemony on the Red Sea, respectively. It is important to note here that the Gulf ambitions on the Red Sea are in total harmony with those of their masters in the West, specially the US.

Ethiopia is not the only landlocked country in Africa. If we accept that there are 55 countries in Africa, recognized by the African Union and the United Nations, about 16 of them (almost 30%) are landlocked. Those who overlook this truth would ask: *Does being landlocked matter at all?* No doubt losing access to the sea is a significant blow, politically, militarily and economically. Nonetheless, we do not waste too much time on the obvious. To that effect, we will try to summarize the situation in a short paragraph below.

Importing and exporting goods is much cheaper and faster over water than land. This means that access to the sea makes it easier for nations to participate in global economy. It is not only in terms of tourism, the world's largest industry, but lack of access to easy transit is a more deterrent factor at times of natural disaster or violent regional conflicts, making it difficult for people to escape from the danger, or for assistance to reach them. Add to these, the flow of people and ideas that brought innovation to maritime countries largely bypassed the landlocked ones.

In terms of the Ethiopian context, it is appropriate to raise the significant question: *What is the landlocked Ethiopia supposed to do?* To get the specifics of the dynamics, we will discuss the ideal solution, and the real one on the ground, evolved after the signing of the so called "Peace Agreement" between Dr. Abiy Ahmed and Atse Isias.

In theory, there is (UNCLOS), which is also called the **Law of the Sea Convention** or *the Law of the Sea Treaty*. This is the international agreement resulting from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), which took place between 1973 and 1982. These provisions define the rights and responsibilities of nations on how to use the world's oceans and seas, serving as guidelines concerning business, environment, and management of marine resources. Ethiopia had signed the treaty on December 10, 1982. This shows that Ethiopia has only one legal way to follow, and that is signing treaties with the transit states for its

goods and mobility of people. In fact, Ethiopia is lucky because out of the six countries surrounding it (Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, & South Sudan) only one has no access to the sea, and that is South Sudan. This is the ideal solution referred to above.

However, the implementation of these guidelines is not always easy. The transit countries, or those with access to the sea, have a remarkable leverage in the implementation. Ethiopia is following the guidelines mainly with Djibouti, the Sudan and Somalia. But when it comes to Eritrea, which has been the target of its expansionist nationalism since 1940s, is using twisted methods, unscrupulous manipulations, artful, unfair and insidious means to illegally control the Eritrean coastline, even after the country won its national independence. As we do not want to pass the term “expansionist nationalism” without defining the term, it is important to raise the question: *What is expansionist nationalism? What are its basic features? With which other concept does it share some commonalities?*

Expansionist nationalism is opposite of liberal nationalism (dating back to the French Revolution of 1789 and its incendiary slogan of liberty, fraternity and equality), which has two important aspects: the right of self-determination to nations, and firm opposition to imperialism. To have a clearer picture, we raise the question: *In what way is this concept opposed to the aspects of liberal nationalism?* The following features of expansionist nationalism should be recognized:

- It rejects the right of self-determination to nations.
- It opposes inclusion, diversity and social progress.
- The mindset of chauvinism and linguistic jingoism (the belief that one’s language is the best and the most original, and that all others are pathetic) are among its major characteristics.
- It is an extreme form of nationalism, and ultra-nationalism is a core element in fascist ideology, which in many places in the world justified territorial expansion at the cost of the neighbours.
- Unlike liberal nationalism, which is grounded on mutual respect among sovereign nations, the aim of expansionist nationalism is territorial and economic expansion. The goal it shares with imperialism (the policy to expand a country’s power and regulate it through diplomacy and military force) is that both acquire new territories to rule.

Taking the foregoing into account: ***Could anybody tell me if these features are not amply present in the Ethiopian Neo-Expansionist Nationalism, as manifested by Dr. Abiy Ahmed and his team?*** Just a quick reminder is that the wide circulation of the old Ethiopian map that included Eritrea, in the social media these days, is one among the many concrete manifestations of the Ethiopian Neo-Expansionist Nationalism. In few words, the sad conclusion is that the Ethiopian expansionist nationalism, which was kicked out through the door, is coming back through the window, with the help or maybe the initiation of Traitor Isias, unfortunately to end up being the leader of the NEO-ANDENET GANG, the pawn of the Ethiopian Neo-expansionist nationalism. The question imposing itself is: ***In what ways are the NEO-ANDENET and its predecessor, the ANDENET MOVEMENT, similar and different in completing the role of Ethiopia's Expansionist Nationalism?*** The foregoing discussion partially answered this question both directly and indirectly but we will try to give a full picture building on that.

It is commonly believed that the Andenet members of 1940s, 1950s and 1960s had no intention to ruin Eritrea, but were ignorant about Ethiopia. It seems their judgment depended on emotions, sentiments, and hatred of colonialism by the white-man. Though I was not old enough to remember that period, specially the first two decades, I can guess the mentality of the time, knowing some who were said had been members of the Andenet Movement.

It is said ignorance is curable, but I would add, malice and the intent to destroy a country are not. Unlike the Andenet members, the Atse knows who the Ethiopians are, and had been in the struggle playing the game for decades. Though we are not justifying the mistakes and crimes committed by the Andenet members in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s or arguing that ignorance erases the harm done, we believe that there is a deeper reason for the Atse to play a completing role for the Ethiopian Neo-Expansionist aspirations. I do not think we need to elaborate because he has exposed himself enough through his words and deeds, though he and his cult members want us to believe that what he is doing serves the best interest of Eritrea and the region.

All our observations about Ethio-Eritrean relations since the Atse and Dr. Abiy Ahmed became conspiracy partners against the Eritrean people have been conveyed in different ways. But there is one issue we want to raise from a different perspective, though it was raised above as one of the concrete manifestations of Ethiopian Neo-Expansionist Nationalism. It is the circulation of the old Ethiopian

map in which Eritrea is shown as an Ethiopian territory. It is not only circulated in the social media, but is put as a sticker in private vehicles, taxis and buses in Addis Ababa, where Eritrea has an embassy and the Ethiopian Government has eyes and ears everywhere.

Out of the abundance of caution, Dr. Abiy Ahmed's government was expected to educate the public, realizing that there is a complicated job attached to the title Prime Minister. Instead, it allowed itself to become an accomplice in this violation of Eritrean sovereignty, though after a lot of confusion and sharp reaction from Eritreans abroad, it tried to pretend by giving a timid and incomplete apology through one of its embassies. One would be tempted to raise: *Was that silence of the Ethiopian Government a test balloon to see how would the Eritrean people react, and based on the reaction, adjust the implementation of the rest of their evil agenda with their enabler, the Eritrean Traitor-in-Chief?*

Though the circulation of the old Ethiopian map is ridiculously silly and just deserves to be ignored because it does not have any consequence on the sovereignty of our country, the silence from the part of the ruling gang in Eritrea and the Government of Ethiopia, puts them in bad light and is a bit alarming, viewed from the perspective of diplomatic relations in which many simple things could have their own meanings and could trigger negative reactions.

We did not hear anything, even as timid as the reaction of the Ethiopia Government, from the Atse or his cronies, complaining against the circulation of the old map. To put it in the proper context, we ask: *Is this silence or tacit consent?* It is an act of giving green light by implication or without saying it, which is pretty disturbing. In this connection, it is appropriate to give at least one extreme example of how governments react when they find the sovereignty of their country violated in one way or another. Less extreme methods could include state-to-state complaints that could be written or verbal, and written complaints to the United Nations.

Many of us are old enough to remember when Morocco withdrew from the OAU in 1984, after the OAU approved the membership of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, which Morocco does not recognize and thinks the Western Sahara is its territory. At the same time, Morocco severed its diplomatic relations with a number of African countries that recognized the Western Sahara. I am not raising this issue to support Morocco or criticize the OAU, but to show the extent to which governments (not ruling gangs) could go when they think the sovereignty of the

country is violated. But for ruling gangs in general and the Eritrean gang in particular, nothing is surprising because patriotism is a rare commodity.

As the time his support is remarkably shrinking and critical support from Ethiopia is the only straw he has to catch to save his dictatorship from sinking, everything the life-long-Tembenay-turned-Gondare at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour does and says is politically-motivated. Accordingly, it is appropriate to say few things about the current people-to-people diplomacy tour of the Eritrean National Cultural Group. Let us get the basics about people-to-people diplomacy first, before we raise questions and give comments.

The idea of people-to-people diplomacy or citizen exchange, as is sometimes called, is nothing but a trans-national conflict resolution strategy. It reflects the role that private citizens could play in mitigating hostile inter-state relations. After all, it is the ordinary people who form the foundation of a strong and durable bilateral relationship. This non-traditional type of diplomacy stems from the concept that the individual citizen has the right or even the responsibility to help his/her country shape its foreign relations with others.

Based on the facts above, many Eritreans would ask the following critical questions and give the following remarks:

1. To begin with:

- ***Does the Eritrean citizen have basic individual human rights before we expect him/her to help his country shape its foreign relations with others?***
- ***Is he/she allowed to have a say about the vision of the country?***  
Most of the time, people are on the point. But the issue is that: ***Since when does the Atse, who takes decisions not on facts but on his own instinct, believe that he should listen to the people?***

2. ***What should be the priority target of people-to-people diplomacy: regions we have frosty relations with at highest level or where relations are not hostile?*** In other words, the 1998-2000 Badume war was fought

directly with Tigray, not Gojjam, Addis Ababa or Hawassa. This is to raise the question: ***Does the people-to-people program take the politics out?***

### ***3. Was it truly a non-government interaction?***

This program is typical of the Atse's approach. His approach to things does not show that he has the interest to unleash the greater minds and use the country's resources to benefit the people. On the contrary, he wastes everything, including his focus, attention and love, elsewhere. That is why, these days, in all what the Atse says and does, his audience is the Ethiopian people, whose satisfaction is his ultimate goal, no matter how much that could anger the Eritrean people for whom he has nothing but contempt, hatred and disrespect. To wrap up this part, we ask: ***Could it make sense that the devil who had opened wars with four neighbouring countries and currently participating in the war of genocide against the Yemenis would truly believe in people-to-people diplomacy? Who is the naïve to believe this joke?***

The whole course of events directed against the Eritrean people is truly testing the limits of the old saying, "Every cloud has a silver lining." Here we see the two players, the Atse and his Ethiopian partner, ignoring the people as a harmless or marginal force. This is devastatingly shortsighted. Nevertheless, as any sad situation, this may have a more hopeful or positive aspect, though it may not be immediately apparent. That is why the American poet, Emily Dickson (1830-1883), wanted to teach us that, "People need hard times and oppression to develop psychic muscles." This will lead us to the big question: ***Do all events discussed in this piece and other hostile developments help Ethiopia's Neo-expansionist nationalism and its pawn the Neo-Andement scheme of Traitor Isias?***

The high levels of dissatisfaction we see amid our people and the fast shrinking of the support of the regime will definitely have counterproductive effects: radicalization of the public opinion against the regime. The regime has not learned from other countries, where dissatisfaction led to peaceful street protests, and the inevitable subsequent interference of the army, finally causing

the total collapse of the regime. Look at the Sudan, where we have seen heroic deeds in the streets of all major cities for the last two months.

According to some press reports, since December 2019, 31 people have been killed by the security forces and militiamen, while others raise the number to 52. Yet, the protests are continuing daily because no force can break the will of the people. Finally, as a God-send gift to the people of the Sudan, on February 15, 2019, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, expressed his hope that "...calls by the Sudanese people for regime change will be heard." Moreover, he made an urgent call to the international community to mount pressure on Al-Bashier to step down and "...allow a peaceful democratic transition in the Sudan." Given this situation: *What is the most possible scenario?*

Observers who are familiar with the situation and the history of the revolutionary movements in the Sudan expect the following to happen:

- The protesters will escalate the variety of their activities and their numbers will rapidly increase, joined by those standing on the sidelines.
- The international pressure on the President will reach the tipping point.
- There could be change of heart from the side of the security and the army, leading to a swift collapse of the government, leading to the escape of Al-Bashier or his arrest. Here they rule out the possibility that the movement could be crashed.

One would ask: *Why are you interested in other country's affair to that extent?*

We are interested in the Sudanese developments because our country would be affected by them. This will lead us to the legitimate question: *What would be the repercussions of these developments on Eritrea?* The saying: "When Paris catches cold, Europe sneezes." is always true and relevant because it shows the significance of geographical proximity and all things that accompany it. If there is somebody who thinks that Eritrea would be immune, he/she should either be exceptionally naïve or too ignorant to read symptoms we see since the failure of the Forto operation.

In a nutshell, all developments taking place in Eritrea are accumulating, preparing the ground for the Sudan-like eruptions. Once the West, led by the US, reacts positively towards events of this kind, realizing the seriousness of the situation and the devotion of the people, Dr. Abiy Ahmed and the Gulf reactionaries will take their cues from their masters and betray the Atse, their ally and partner. Consequently, the Atse will be left to fight his own battle alone, which means even his closest cronies would betray him at the end of the day. We have seen this happening repeatedly around the globe, where brutal dictators ruled.

Eritrean justice seekers living in Diaspora are way down the road, asking critical questions and speaking out their concern in order to educate the public through all means, while trying to remove the obstacles thwarting their way to work together and coordinate with the patriotic forces inside the country. Protests and calls to the international community are continuing at a better pace. All these tasks are becoming much easier than any ever before with the widespread use of modern technology, the presence of better brains, and continued dedication. One thing is lagging behind: the emergence of a solid national umbrella. Still there are genuine efforts in this direction, but the challenges should not be insurmountable.

The political awareness inside the country is undoubtedly changing for the better, despite the tightening of the iron grip. Patriotic Berhane Abrehe's message of courage, distinction, hope, optimism and truth, is having a positive impact, though the Atse had to revenge on him because he found his ego bruised and his survival threatened. Simultaneously, we hope our Defence Forces will carry the burden of saving the country on their shoulders, by being strong and fine patriots to finish the job started by the hero, Wedi Ali. At the same time, we hope those sticking around the dictator would pay attention to the fate that awaits them, no matter when, and play a positive role by siding with their people.

In few words, there are favourable conditions indicating that we are not sitting on our hands and waiting to hear what is next in Ethiopia's NEO-EXPANSIONIST and Atse Isias's NEO-ANDENET agenda. Nonetheless, we have to remember the

ancient English proverb, ***"TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO ONE."***=====