

REVIEWING OUR TWISTED PRIORITIES AND FIXING THE DEEP DIVIDE AMONG ERITREANS FIRST:

(Part II)

Abdu Habib

Beqaq835@yahoo.com

NOTE TO THE READERS:

This is the second part of a two-part article, originally posted on June 7, 2018, when discussions and talk about tying Eritrea with Ethiopia by federation emerged in some platforms, and dominated the social media (we do not know who the origin of the idea of initiating the controversy is). The same issue came into the open currently, with the main initiator of the controversy being the Ethiopian government itself (through the spokes-person of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). I re-post the article, hoping that it could help in removing some of the clouds over the issue, and advising the Ethiopian side to know their limit, while showing the right conditions for the possible forms of cooperation between the two countries, and dwelling on the Eritrean priorities that are not fully addressed yet.

Rejecting the talk about “federation” in Ethio-Eritrean relations does not mean that the two countries should not have realistic forms of cooperation, or even economic integration (whatever name it is given), that is mutually beneficial in all fields. Cooperation is very essential because the two countries badly need each other to survive and prosper, at this worrisome time. This will lead us to two fundamental questions that the remaining part of this piece will be focusing on. These questions are: **How and when can we achieve a full-fledged strategic cooperation that could be promoted to the level of economic integration? What should be the role of Eritrean and Ethiopian intellectuals, politicians, and nationalists, until we achieve that?** By raising these fundamental questions, we are trying to show that we cannot jump over realities. That is to say that we

should rather do the first things first, as the quotation at the top of the introduction suggests.

With regard to the question on how and when could it be possible for the two countries to have a full-fledged strategic cooperation that could be promoted to the level of economic integration, one has to see, without any bias, the glaring differences between the two current political systems in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Ethiopia is an emerging democracy, whereas Eritrea is ruled by a brutal dictatorship, where there is no constitution, which is the guarantee for the rule of law, participation of the people in running the affairs of the state, through democratic institutions, collective leadership (not one-man show), a clear line of demarcation between the three branches of government, and free press. Simply put, none of these exists even in name in Eritrea, except the three fake branches of the government, whose heads (the ministers) are nothing but errand boys for the Atse. This does not mean that the Ethiopian political system is perfect. It only means that it is on the right track, though a lot remains to be done. The core issue we are driving at could be formulated in the question: ***Is sustainable economic integration possible between two political systems that are poles apart in everything fundamental, as shown above?***

There is no doubt that, limited or on-and-off cooperation is possible, as we see it in many countries with different social and political systems, but a strategic one promoted to the level of economic integration is impossible, unless there is harmony between the paths the different countries follow. True, we learn in physics that opposites attract, and likes repel. This natural principle is axiomatic when it comes to magnetism only. But political systems, just like human beings, are more likely to be attracted by others that are more like themselves across a broad range of characteristics.

To illustrate, Ethiopia seems to believe that peace with its neighbours is an essential ingredient for development, whereas the Atse's Eritrea, where the regime is inching close to collapse, needs instability in the region, in order to prolong its life. In other words, for the Atse, the survival of his regime is the top priority; not the development of the country.

Other bones of contention between Ethiopia and Eritrea under the Atse include: the belief on the importance of constitution, participation of the people through their democratic institutions, elections, collective leadership, the rule of law, and free press, to mention some. We are not saying that Ethiopia is perfect in these areas, but the journey has already started, and we daily see tangible improvements, with enough ray of hope that democratization will collect momentum and show a qualitative change.

On the flip side, Atse Isias, among many things, detests the concepts of constitution, rule of law, elections, participation of the people, collective leadership, and press. In fact, he looks to each one of these concepts as a threat to his rule. As “birds of the same feather flock together”, we see the ruling gang, headed by the Atse, alluringly flirting with the reactionary Gulf states. Further, as opposite political systems have no congruence in the principles, in which they believe, we see the Atse who is everything Eritrean (the leader, the people, and the country) giving his back to Ethiopia, labeling it as an enemy. These are objectively permanent and strategic behaviours dictated by fundamental positions on issues of principle, detailed above, and will continue as long as Ethiopia follows the democratic path it has started, and unless the winds of Arab Spring hit and engulf the Gulf states. In few words, no matter what depth the Ethiopian democratization process has, or which party rules the country (even if it is Ginbot 7, its closest ally), Atse Isias will never cease to see Ethiopia as a serious threat to his rule, and destabilize it by any means.

With regard to the border issue, it could be said that it is the current excuse; not the real cause that made the ruling gang bent on destabilizing Ethiopia. It would be plain naïve to think that there will be permanent peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea under the ruling gang, if the border conflict is settled.

In summary, if we examine the problem properly, we would find the root cause to be the irreconcilable contradictions between the two different systems that will never be in harmony, unless one of them changes. Investigating an intriguing step further, one would find the role the psychopathic personality of the Atse had played in the senseless border conflict. Nevertheless, we leave his psychopathic

personality to be a fodder for future psychiatric study, but for now, we need to stop the devastation it is causing inside Eritrea and in the region, as a whole.

The understanding attempted to drive home, as detailed above, will hopefully help Ethiopians and Eritreans, who believe in the peaceful co-existence between the two sovereign states and their economic integration in future, create favourable conditions for those dreams. To be specific, the effort of creating favourable conditions should include identifying and cooperating in the removal of the biggest obstacle to the regional peace and prosperity; in this case the ruling gang in Eritrea. That is the main reason that leads us to conclude that the interests of our two peoples and countries coincide at this historical juncture.

As a bridge to the second question, which is the role of the Eritrean and Ethiopian intellectuals, politicians, and nationalists in preparing the ground for the future cooperation or economic integration between the two countries, we would raise the question: ***Do we Eritreans really stand on solid footing in terms of national unity so that we could think of building partnership with others?***

Eritrean intellectuals have not done enough to put their own house in order, by uniting the Eritrean justice seekers, so that they could bring the downfall of the ruling gang, and lay the foundation for the desired democratic Eritrea our people dream to see. Taking the realities of the Eritrean opposition or justice seekers into account, one would ask: ***What a twisted priority it is to think about building friendly relations with our Ethiopian neighbours at the time we ourselves are at loggerheads with each other over everything big or small?*** We doubt it very much that even those, who claim reconciliation is one of their agendas, are clear about their priorities and are acting on them.

Accordingly, we need to know the basics about the concept of putting our first things first, which means doing the most important things first. That could sound pretty easy and intuitive, at the first sight, even when it comes to our personal life, but many of us fall into the trap of getting caught up in non-important things. This might have happened to our Eritrean organizations, institutions, and prominent figures that had started talking about their agenda of reconciliation, while some claimed that it is one of their missions. I do not want to point fingers,

but one would urge them to check their programs and slogans to answer the questions:

- ***Where is that big sounding word, “reconciliation”, they had put in their program or mission statement?***
- ***What happened to it?***
- ***Is it because of a partisan approach (political affiliation) or bias that they could not achieve anything in that direction?***
- ***Is the problem failure to study the basics about the Time Management Matrix or to follow them?***

I hope they do self-assessment, and correct their path, if they want to keep afloat. If the problem is self-bias or partisanship (whether it is political, religious, cultural, regional, or linguistic) that disqualifies an organization, institution, or individual, from working for real reconciliation, there is nothing we could say, except pray to the Lord to help them with themselves. If the problem has to do with Time Management Matrix, we urge them to study how the Time Management Matrix works, and learn to manage the difference between what is “urgent” and what is “important”. Though the purpose here is not to teach Time Management Matrix, there is one quick remark to make.

When we consider our priorities, we have to push aside what is “important”, and deal with what is “urgent”, but finally, what is important is the one to remain important. In this connection, it should be noted here that there could be some Eritrean efficiency experts (thanks to Atse Isias, Eritrea’s brains have fled the country), who could be of great help, if we admit that there are things we need to learn from experts, or if we are ready to abandon the idea that we know everything.

Other than the major factors that we always raise, one of the reasons that makes bringing Eritreans together difficult, is the conceited thinking of some Eritrean organizations, institutions, and prominent figures, that no change could be achieved without it or him or her. We have to admit that incredibly well-spoken,

savvy, and energizing young men and women, with better skills and capabilities, are emerging, and are fast making the old hands obsolete in all aspects of Eritrean life, be it in politics or communities in Diaspora. The older generations should acknowledge the timely change, and leave the leadership for the new generations that will live longer. They should be given the opportunity to shape the future of the country, which is their future, the way they want it to be. The old generations have already had their role in the play; now the new generations should have theirs. It is unfair to deprive the youth of that role. This is the tendency we see in Eritrean politics, and our Diaspora communities.

Another group that needs to be accommodated consists of citizens, who had different historical or political background, and are comparatively late-comers to the opposition camp. Here too, every institution, organization, and prominent figure, is urged to be modest and tolerant, avoiding the damaging thinking that it, he or she is the authority qualified to be the best defender of the Eritrean State or the Eritrean Revolution, or to issue clearance certificate just because of a certain historical background or historical coincidence. No citizen is more citizen or less citizen than another. Citizenship equalizes all in rights and duties, without any exception.

In few words, the notion of first things first also covers the accommodation of all citizens, ready to join the national struggle for justice and democracy. We raise this point because we sometimes see bias standing on the way of the progress, in the efforts to build a solid front against the dictatorship. In fact, rejecting or isolating willing citizens to join the national struggle, is one of the obstacles we need immediately to address, and a dangerous barrier to remove.

To put it differently, the nature of the struggle against the ruling gang in Eritrea demands the winning of as many supporters as possible for the struggle, while neutralizing as many as possible from the pro-gang camp. It is our firm belief that every Eritrean willing to participate in the struggle for regime change in the country, irrespective of one's past or background, should not be isolated or attacked or face the irresponsible acts of rejection. We have to leave historical accountability for the day of the reckoning, or the time when justice will prevail,

and nobody will escape accountability for a crime committed (knowing that political views are not crimes but the right of any citizen). The same thing could be said about organizations and institutions that some of us try to attack for their historical backgrounds.

As to the second part of the second question or the role of the Ethiopian intellectuals, politicians, and nationalists, who are committed to the full-fledged cooperation promoted to full economic integration between Eritrea and Ethiopia, a lot has been said above. Nevertheless, there are few things to add and others to reiterate. These could be summed up as follows:

- As discussed above, it should first be recognized that any meaningful cooperation between the two countries is impossible, as long as Eritrea is under the ruling gang. The nature of the regime does not allow it to be engaged in cooperation with a government that believes in constitution, rule of law, elections, participation of the people in running the affairs of the state, collective leadership, free press, and the like. As the PFDJ gang looks to the Ethiopian Government as a threat, it will never stop its sinister schemes to destabilize it. This hostile position of the ruling gang in Eritrea should bring all Ethiopian contingents that want to see economic integration between the two countries, closer to the Eritrean justice seekers, who are struggling to bring regime change. As the Eritrean justice seekers are for Eritrea that co-exists peacefully with its neighbours, and cooperates with them for the common good and prosperity of their peoples, they need a full and unyielding support, so that they could bring about a swift regime change, from which all peace-loving neighbours would benefit. In the absence of that, nothing will be changed in Eritrea, and the whole region as well. As the message is clear, there is no need for further elaboration.
- It should also be realized that unprincipled alliance of any Ethiopian contingent with Eritrea's butcher, who has waged a war against democracy and its institutions, rule of law, collective leadership, free press, and all democratic values, will damage the integrity and credibility of the

contingents themselves in front of their people, before it harms the long-term prospect of Ethiopia.

To reiterate, spending time, energy, resources, and attention on the project to build friendship with our Ethiopian neighbours at this particular time, when Eritreans themselves are deeply divided and fragmented, is a distracter that prevents us from doing the essential things to solidify the front against the regime that has put the country in great danger. This is not to suppress conversation with Ethiopians, but to do the first things first. Nothing will take place unless we unite Eritreans to stand up. Above all, it is time to put some momentum on the issue of reconciliation and move things fast enough to save the country from the grip of the ruling gang, and change it from the medieval age to 21st century. That is our top priority that deserves all our energy, time, skills, and attention, at this stage of our history.

While the economic cooperation, or at best economic integration, with Ethiopia is not a choice but a necessity (We are glad that the Prime Minister's vision coincides with this view), this is impossible as long as Eritrea is ruled by the gang, that sees the democratic process in Ethiopia as a threat, and as a system to be destabilized. This makes the removal of the regime beneficial to Ethiopians too. We are for the resolution of the border conflict and the demarcation of the borders, but we do not believe only that would bring permanent peace between Ethiopia and the ruling gang in Eritrea. In a nutshell, we are talking about a regime that sees Ethiopia as a threat merely because Ethiopians have constitution, all basic freedoms, and elections.

We are extremely happy about the good news that went viral in this couple of days, heralding the incredible announcement from the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, and the leading coalition, the EPRDF, about Ethiopia's readiness to implement the verdict on the border conflict without any pre-condition, in addition to the Prime Minister's vision for future cooperation between the two countries. However, time will tell, but we doubt many Eritreans would be optimistic enough that the Ethiopian positive gesture will be met with a reciprocal positive reaction from the ruling gang in Eritrea.

When we say this, it is not to destroy the faith of the Ethiopians on the goodwill they have shown, but to alert that nobody should be surprised, if we hear incapacitating or impossible terms from the Eritrean side. To leave it here, the most intriguing question remains: ***Is Badume the real problem between Eritrea and Ethiopia?***