

PRESS RELEASE

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THE QUESTION OF ASSAB AND THE ALGIERS AGREEMENT AND THE ISSUE OF TERRORISM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA.

The question of Assab and the Algiers Agreement, are the two burning issues of our time as far as Ethiopia is concerned. Moreover, the presence of Al-Qaeda in Somalia concerns Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans since the expansion of Al-Qaeda in the region is against the interest of the United States and that of Ethiopia.

The emergence of Al-Qaeda in Somalia could be the turning point in international terrorism since Al-Qaeda can use Somalia as a training ground for terrorists as it had used Afghanistan before November, 2001. Al-Qaeda can expand its terrorist activities throughout the world using Somalia as its base. Ethiopia being the major power in the Horn of Africa, it can minimize the influence of Al-Qaeda if the United States and other major western countries cooperate with Ethiopia in fighting terrorism.

Moreover, the stability in the Horn of Africa is the key to a long lasting peace in the region. However, the Eritrean Government arming and training terrorists in the Horn of Africa has contributed to the instability of the region. Above all, the Algiers Agreement and the Border Commission's decision to grant Badme to Eritrea and because Assab was taken away from Ethiopia in 1993, has outraged many Ethiopians. This being the case, the Ethiopian-American Forum has decided to take a firm stand on the above issues since those issues affect both the United States and Ethiopia. As a result, the Ethiopian-American Forum is requesting the Ethiopian Government to take the following steps in order to address the above mentioned issues. However, before we go to our recommendation, we will present a historical background of Ethiopia and Eritrea so that the above issues can be understood with utmost clarity.

Eritrea had been part of Ethiopia since the time of Queen of Sheba for about 3000 years until its independence in 1993 except for 62 years under Italian and British rule between 1890 and 1952. "The place she is said to have given birth to her son is on the outskirts of Asmara South, near Tsa'da Christian...She named her son Menelik and when he grew up he went to Jerusalem to visit his father. King Solomon received him with great honor and urged his son to stay in Jerusalem. Menelik refused and decided to return to his home country, Ethiopia." W. Budge, The Queen of Sheba and her only son Minyelek, (London, 1922. p. 48). Therefore, not only Menelik I was born on the outskirts of Asmara, the present day Eritrea was also part of Ethiopia during the time of Queen of Sheba. Above all, recent archeological findings confirmed that Queen of Sheba had indeed ruled Ethiopia around 1000 B.C. i.e. about 3000 years ago. Thus, there is no doubt that Eritrea had been part of Ethiopia for the last 3000 years. Moreover, the people of Tigray and the Eritrean highlanders i.e. Hamasen, Seraya, and Akele Guzay are one

and the same people as far as language, culture, history etc. are concerned. Besides, the name Eritrea did not exist before 1890 until the Italians named that part of Ethiopia after they colonized it. "The Italians, on 1 January 1890 officially named their colony, after Latin term ERYTHRAEM MARE i.e. Red Sea." Richard Pankhurst, The Ethiopians, (Oxford: Blackwell pub. Ltd, 1998, p. 186).

In 1890 when Italians colonized Eritrea, Menelik II realized that he would not be able to defend Eritrea against the Italian colonial power. At the time, Menelik was by far weaker than the Italians. Therefore Menelik chose not to risk the rest of Ethiopia by trying to defend Eritrea. As a result, Menelik was forced to sign the Treaty of Wechalle. Despite the Wechalle Treaty, the Italians decided to colonize Ethiopia. "...Prime Minister Fransico used incorrectly and in bad faith article 17 as a basis for formally proclaiming Ethiopia a Protectorate of Italy." George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 2-3).

Then, in 1896, Ethiopia had to go to war against Italy because of the Treaty of Wechalle and because Italy invaded Ethiopia. Fortunately, Ethiopia defeated the Italians in the Battle of Adwa, and became the first country to defeat a colonial power. As a result, Ras Alula wanted to regain back Eritrea because of the 1896 victory at Adwa. "Ras Alula... took a stronger position. He declared himself determined to exploit the victory by advancing on the coast and throwing the invaders into the sea. Menelik, however, refused to countenance any such action." (Pankhurst, 1998, p. 192). Thus, Menelik realizing that not only Italy could have brought additional forces, but it might have gotten additional assistance from other European countries since Europeans were upset because a white colonial power was defeated by a black African country. Therefore, Menelik did not want the rest of Ethiopia to be colonized and was forced to accept the amended Treaty of Wechalle. However, Ethiopians continued to claim Eritrea as part of Ethiopia until Eritrea rejoined her motherland Ethiopia in 1952 in a federation. Therefore, Eritrea had been part of Ethiopia for 3000 years except between 1890 and 1952. However, it is true that the Ethiopian sea ports, especially Massawa, had been repeatedly invaded by different foreign countries because of the inability of the Ethiopian Government to defend the Ethiopian borders. Moreover, the constant battle among regional forces within Ethiopia, opened the door for foreign invaders.

This being the case, there is no basis for someone to claim that the Eritrean case is a colonial question since Ethiopia cannot colonize part of its own territory i.e. Eritrea. Besides, there are historical and economic factors among other things, that characterizes colonialism as in the case of European colonizers and their former colonies. For instance, Europeans were by far more advanced in economic development relatively compared to their former colonies. In that regard, Eritrea was actually more developed, especially in the industrial sector than the rest of Ethiopia. We could have discussed other factors to show that the Eritrean case is truly a national question instead of a colonial question. However, since that is not the central issue of this paper we chose not to go into such details. However, in short, it is ridiculous to even suggest that the Eritrean case is a colonial question. Almost all political organizations including EPRP, MEISON, and even the Student Movement since 1969, considered the Eritrean case as a national

question. However, TPLF was among the few who considered the Eritrean case as a colonial question since it was dependent on EPLF at least in the beginning. Thus, EPLF deliberately and falsely claimed that the Eritrean case to be a colonial question for the purpose of denying each nationality within Eritrea, the right to self-determination. For instance, if it were a national question, the Afar nationality could have chosen to stay with Ethiopia and both sea ports could have stayed with Ethiopia since the Afar people live on the Eritrean coastline. That was precisely why EPLF falsely claimed that the Eritrean case to be a colonial question instead of a national question.

On the whole, the national question was totally misunderstood by many people including by Joseph Stalin who was considered by many an authority on this subject. For instance, Stalin thought that national movements arise especially in countries where there is low level of capitalist development and he thought socialism would address the peoples' needs and national liberation movements will cease to exist and be replaced with class struggle. However, the Soviet Union was disintegrated after 73 years of socialism. The same thing happened in Yugoslavia. Similarly, Walleigne Mekonnen in 1969 made a similar prediction. "A socialist Eritrea and Bale would give a great impetus to the revolution in the country and could form an egalitarian and democratic basis for re-unification" (Walleigne Mekonnen "On the Question of Nationalities" November 17, 1969, p. 4). Therefore, the national question issue was misunderstood by many people especially in Ethiopia and it may be responsible for some of the current problems in Ethiopia. It will continue to be a problem unless we learn a lesson from past mistakes and approach this sensitive issue with great care. That is precisely why Article 39 should be carefully reconsidered since regional autonomy can address the national question. We believe that the current Ethiopian Government also made similar mistakes. However, others argue along the line of conspiracy theory. At this point, it does not matter what the truth is. We simply request the Ethiopian Government to correct its mistakes and bring back Assab so that Ethiopia can have access to the sea. We also believe that we have a golden opportunity to do just that at this particular time because of a favorable international situation as will be shown later. For those of you who believe that this government will not be willing to bring back Assab, we cannot afford to wait since international situations can change and this golden opportunity may not be there when another government takes power. Therefore, whether we like it or not we have to plead with this government to secure Assab as soon as possible.

Even though Al-Qaeda was driven out Afghanistan in late 2001 by the U.S. forces, Al-Qaeda has taken roots in Somalia and will use Somalia as a training ground for terrorists as it used Afghanistan until October, 2001. Al-Qaeda can expand terrorism throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, United States, and the rest of the world. This being the case Ethiopia has a significant role in minimizing the impact of Al-Qaeda since Ethiopia is the major power in the region. In that regard, Ethiopia is very indispensable as far as fighting terrorism in the Horn of Africa is concerned. That in turn means, the West will support Ethiopia especially in view of the fact that the Eritrean Government has chosen to train and arm the terrorists using funds from some Arab countries. That in turn helps Ethiopia in the United Nations with regards to the issue of the port of Assab as will be shown later.

With regards to the situations in Ethiopia, the OLF, ONLF and other liberations fronts are getting stronger by the day and they can reach to the point threatening the territorial integrity of Ethiopia as long as Issayas continues to arm, train, and provide assistance to these organizations. Some Ethiopians as well as the Ethiopian Government would like to focus on issues of poverty and economic development instead of fighting against Issayas. As a result, the Ethiopian Government has decided to wait until Issayas invades Ethiopia. However, Issayas is not stupid to start a war with Ethiopia before the liberation fronts are strong enough to break up Ethiopia. As soon as they reach that stage, Issayas will invade to give Ethiopia the final blow. Thus, to wait for Issayas to invade Ethiopia, is just like waiting for a cancer to spread instead of removing it before it is too late. Above all, the frustration of our brothers and sisters in Eritrea and the presence of the Eritrean Government in exile and the U.S. support for a regime change, has created a fertile ground to help liberate the Eritrean people from the tyranny of Issayas and his regime. At the same time, it will become possible to unite the Afar people. Then, as soon as Afar is liberated, the Afar people will invite the United Nations to hold a referendum and we are hoping Afar will join its motherland, Ethiopia, and Assab will be returned back to Ethiopia, legally! Similarly, the Eritrean people will have a referendum and will decide whether they would like to join Ethiopia in a form of federation or confederation or remain independent as they are now. Then the issues of Assab, the unity of the Afar people and the possible reunification of Ethiopia and Eritrea will be resolved once and for all. As a result, Ethiopia will be able to focus on issues of poverty and economic development among other things. Ethiopia should also be able to resolve the issues of OLF, and ONLF within the framework of regional autonomy.

Above all, this war against Eritrea will not last long as it did in 1998-2000 since the Eritrean people including the Eritrean soldiers will not fight due to the fact that they understand that Ethiopia is liberating the Eritrean people from Issayas' dictatorship and possibly stop Issayas from destroying Eritrea.

Some Ethiopians argue that U.N. will impose sanctions on Ethiopia. Sanctions are not automatically imposed and depend upon international situations. Even if we assume that sanctions will be imposed, Ethiopia has to be determined to liberate the Afar people and secure the port of Assab. Once the liberation is completed and referendum is held, there is no reason for the sanctions to continue. All these could be accomplished in a very short time and Ethiopia can handle the possible sanctions. Above all, Ethiopia does not have a better alternative since Ethiopia with more than 83 million people cannot continue to develop without a sea port. However, some Ethiopians like Dr. Yacob H. Mariam suggests that Ethiopia appeals to the United Nations by going back to 1952 and argue that Assab was planned to be given to Ethiopia if the federation had not taken place. We believe that is a weak argument. However, we can use such argument to stop the possible sanctions after we liberate the Afar people and secure Assab. We should not be optimistic like the Ethiopian Government was in the case of the Algiers Agreement. The Ethiopian people have to control their own destiny and there is no room for error this time as in the case of the Algiers Agreement. Therefore, the only sure way is to liberate the Afar people in Eritrea, unite the Afar people, and get back the Assab Port legally through referendum as shown above.

In addition, we have to make sure that Somalia is stable and we should wait for the African forces to replace the Ethiopian soldiers since by staying in Somalia, Ethiopia will make sure that Al-Qaeda will not take power in Somalia. Therefore, we ask some opposition leaders to be patient since the liberation of the Afar people and the return of Assab will not materialize if we allow Al-Qaeda to take power in Somalia by withdrawing abruptly. Besides, if Ethiopia withdraws now, Al-Qaeda will fight inside Ethiopia along with Issayas against Ethiopia. Therefore, it would not be a wise decision to withdraw now.

The Ethiopian Government must dump the Algiers Agreement for the following reasons. In the first place, the Eritrean Government has violated the Algiers Agreement including violating the security zone among many other things. As a result, the Algiers Agreement becomes null and void. Secondly, the Border Commission's ruling was not based on objective and concrete evidence, to grant Badme to Eritrea. Thirdly, if Ethiopia accepts the Algiers Agreement and accepts the ruling of the Border Commission, Ethiopia will be forced to recognize the Eritrean boundary including Assab as part of Eritrea. Fourthly, Ethiopia's refusal to accept the Algiers Agreement will force Issayas to invade Ethiopia, and Ethiopia will have a good justification to defend itself and will be able to liberate the Afar people within Eritrea and secure Assab legally as shown above. Ethiopia will also liberate the Eritrean people from the dictatorship of Issayas. In short, the 83 million Ethiopian people will never have peace with the Eritrean Government as long as Assab is not returned back to Ethiopia. Therefore the Eritrean Government and the International Community should understand peace and stability will not prevail in the region until and unless Assab is returned back to Ethiopia. If the Ethiopian Government fails to secure Assab, the effort will continue by successive governments and the war with Eritrea will continue until Ethiopia secures Assab since Ethiopia's future depends on its access to the sea.

Lastly, we call upon Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans to request the Ethiopian Government to take the above steps so that we can unite the Afar people and regain Assab and possibly create a favorable situation so that Eritrea could rejoin her motherland, Ethiopia in a form of federation or confederation based on the wishes of the Ethiopian and the Eritrean people.

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