

## ***The Erosion and Surrender of Eritrean Sovereignty: The Work of a Well-Implanted Predatory Mole in the Eritrean Liberation Struggle***

*"If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it is a duck." A 19<sup>th</sup> Century American poet*

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**Introduction:** The history of the Eritrean liberation struggle is replete with secrecies, lack of transparencies and accountabilities, mistrusts, internecine warfare, wide spread disappearances of nationally important figures under very suspicious circumstances, deep-rooted inhumane treatments of Eritrean subjects, etc. The top-down fully regimented and tightly controlled organizational structures of the liberation organizations, gave few at the top of the leadership echelon fertile opportunities to manipulate the system for untoward unscrupulous ends. These very few, if not only one, at the top had the full monopoly of information, resources, authority and power, while the rest of the members of the organizations (both fighters and non-fighters) had none except their commitments to die for the cause of Eritrea's independence and to obey orders given from above without questioning the "intentions" and efficacies of the orders. This kind of information, resources and power asymmetry made the system to be susceptible to enemy infiltration at the top. Once an enemy is successful in implanting a mole at the top, not only can it easily control the system but also the well-implanted mole can remain masked behind "nationalistic curtain" until the mission is successfully completed. Against the backdrop of what has been transpiring concerning the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia recently and given what the Eritrean regime has been doing to Eritrea from the get go, it seems that Ethiopia has had successfully implanted a mole in the Eritrean liberation movements to "catch and kill" the Eritrean struggle for self-determination.

Now, thinking that circumstances have changed, the mole has started to operate in the open unmasked and in the process the Eritrean people are able to learn that the culprit has been none other than Issaias Afeworki. There are hard data and circumstantial evidences that indicate that Issaias has been an "Ethiopian Asset" in the Eritrean system (both before and after independence). There are many known knowns, many known unknowns, and many unknown unknowns surrounding this issue. But, it suffices to mention only a few known knowns such as the following (I am sure most Eritreans have heard about them) to establish the truthfulness of this assertion:-

- ❖ Issaias Afeworki joined the liberation movement under very suspicious manner, to say the least;
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki used to meet Ethiopian leaders secretly in Kagnaw (Amara), at least during the early stage of the liberation era;
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki used to get military aid (arms) from Ethiopia, at least during the early stage of the liberation era;
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki designed and implemented a scheme to allow Ethiopians to join and serve among the ranks and files as well as in the top leadership echelon of the EPLF – today, having effectively cleansed Eritrean leaders (G-15 and many others can be mentioned as examples), Issaias has surrounded himself by leaders of Ethiopian heritages who joined the EPLF under this scheme ( note: No Ethiopian was allowed to join the ELF as a matter of policy and national security prudence);
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki not only orchestrated, designed, and led wars against and to eliminate and push the ELF (the Liberation Army) and other nationalist liberation organizations out of Eritrea, but also, even worse, invited and used Ethiopian Forces (the TPLF and others, including elements from the Derg Regime) in joint operations to do so and consequently succeeded in monopolizing the Eritrean field by eliminating any potential competitor (thousands of Eritrean fighter perished, disabled, forced into exile, thousands of Eritrean civilians were displaced and forced into exile, etc.);

- ❖ Issaias Afeworki surrender the administration of the town of Badma and its environs to TPLF in the 1980's;
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki had an agreement (in February 1991, almost on the eve of the complete liberation of Eritrea in May 1991) to establish a “unity government” together with Ethiopian forces after the demise of Derg Regime;
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki ordered the People's Army not to liberate Asmara (not to enter Asmara) on the eve of May 24, 1991 (the People's Army reject the order and liberate Asmara and consequently Eritrea as a whole);
- ❖ Issaias Afeworki order the Eritrean Army to withdraw from the Burie Front during the Ethio-Eritrean border war (1998-2000) which amounts to clearing the obstacle for the Ethiopian Army to seize Assab. Luckily, the Eritrean Army rejected his orders and saved not only Assab but also Eritrean sovereignty. Known now that Ethiopia still occupies sovereign Eritrean land that it grabbed then, imagine what could have happened if the Eritrean Army had obeyed Issaias' orders and withdrew and Ethiopia was able to occupy Assab. Add to this, what Issaias has been doing and saying recently. Namely, not only has Issaias unequivocally expressed that he is not interested in border demarcation but also is ready to give his life for the cause of Ethiopia. He said “I will give my life for Ethiopia” and to be fair, that is exactly what he has been doing all his life – to surrender Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia.

During this long road to the “surrender of Eritrean sovereignty”, Issaias first seized the top mantle of the EPLF leadership and used it to commit incalculable heinous crimes against Eritrean nationalist figures in order to achieve his implanters' long-term sinister plan hidden behind an *'Eritrean Nationalist Curtain'*. This article is not about what Issaias, as a mole in the Eritrean Liberation Struggle, did during the war of liberation era. That part is relegated to those who were with him write and talk about it (there are few who have already started to do so). It is rather about how Issaias, in his efforts to create the condition necessary to achieve his long-term objective, was able to empty Eritrea of its native population in general and its youth in particular since 1991 and in the process how he was able to deprive Eritrea of the necessary condition for its survival as a sovereign country and people.

***The Background and the Context:*** Most Eritreans in general and almost all of those who participated in the struggle in particular, concurred to the idea that the Eritrean liberation struggle was a struggle for statehood, national identity, and socio-cultural and economic emancipations of the Eritrean people. With that fervor, in the first phase of this long struggle, generations of Eritreans collectively waged both peaceful and armed struggle against successive colonial powers and secured Eritrea's *de facto* and *de jure* independence in 1991 and 1993, respectively. The second phase of the struggle was, at least most Eritreans expected it to be, geared towards nation building and the construction of a *democratic developmental state* that commits itself to rapid, balanced, dynamic and sustainable economic growth and socio-cultural emancipation. Not long after independence (particularly post 1997), while the Eritrean people were still in the euphoria of independence, what followed, however, was the slow process of withering the State of Eritrea and consequently the process of *nation building* and the democratization of Eritrea was thwarted by a group of ruthless dictators led by a *predatory mole* (now, we know). As a result, the noble objectives of the liberation struggle were subverted by few unscrupulous predators, now it seems, to serve the national interest of Ethiopia. Generally, the Eritrea state over the last *quarter plus of a century* can only be characterized as a *predatory state* ruled by a predatory dictatorial regime that preys on the Eritrean people. *Little did the Eritrean people know that Issaias' objective has been the erosion of Eritrean Identity and the surrender of Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia from the get go.*

***Expectations and Betrayals:*** As it is customary to happen in similar circumstances, after the independence of Eritrea, the Eritrean public expected Eritrean political leaders to engage all sections of the Eritrean

society in a national debate on nation building and state construction. At minimum, they were expected to create more efficient governance structure and resource allocation system that could guarantee individuals the right to economic freedom - to freely engage in exchange and contract. Instead, post-1997 PFDJ under the leadership of Issaias abandoned the process of proper constitution-making and state construction and primarily engaged in political opportunism that significantly increased its monopoly of political and economic power. What emerged from this process was a predatory state ruled by a ruthless predatory dictator. Consequently, post-independence Eritrea has been ruled by an extreme autocratic dictator that lacks any vision or commitment to promote long-run economic growth or sustainable development, or any provision of public goods. Issaias is famously known for his use of extreme brutality and exclusion as a means for punishing opponents and competitors. He tries to gain and stay in power through the application of ruthless coercion and repression at any cost. Over the years, he has accumulated a high degree of concentrated political power and tries to use it to control vital economic resources and power. Furthermore, instead of using this economic power for any socio-economic growth and development purposes, he uses it to dismantle or to disintegrate the *“Eritrean Nuclear Family”* as a unity of structure and function of the Eritrean society and consequently to destroy the fabric of the Eritrean society once and for all. The sad story is that this policy of his worked very effectively and consequently, having lost most of their respective residents to continuous out-migration, today, many villages and towns in Eritrea are almost empty. This is betrayal of the highest order of an innocent people who paid huge price in blood and treasure to secure its self-determination as a sovereign people and country.

**Preying on the Eritrean People:** The above mentioned kinds of predatory behaviors of Issaias have also effectively thwarted constitution making and the development of public institutions over the last 25 plus years in Eritrea. As we all remember, in his 2015 New Year interview, Issaias has finally declared that the 1997 constitution was dead before even being promulgated. What this means is that Issaias and his regime have been and want to continue effectively denying the Eritrean people their rights to have a constitutional government, rule of law, and social and economic prosperity. Consequently, in today’s Eritrea, there are no constitutional provisions to constrain state behavior and instead Issaias determines who has power and to what ends that power can be used. Hence, for more than two plus decades, Issaias presided over an extreme set of absolute and extractive political and economic institutions and has been running Eritrea as if it were his own private property. He hands over favors and seeks patronage and ruthlessly punishes for any lack of loyalty. There are no formal institutions that place restrictions on politicians’ actions and make them accountable to citizens. One aspect of this logic/fact is that Issaias can do whatever he wants with and to Eritrea. What Issaias has been doing, with respect to the so called peace initiative with Ethiopia, recently without neither the consent nor the knowledge of the Eritrean people, emanates from this logic.

The other aspect of the logic, a precondition for the first one, is that the regime has been able to pursue inefficient policies that transfer resources from the public to the ruling group. This small group controls and runs the state of Eritrea and uses its power to transfer and suck a large fraction of the Eritrean society’s resources for themselves. It should be noted here that the regime is using state structures and regulatory power to continue to monopolize the allocation of resources and to redistribute income and wealth in its favor. In the process, it continues to marginalize, impoverish, and man-hunt the majority of Eritreans. As a matter of fact, the Eritrean people have become *“captive prey”* and its bare survival has been under threat from excessive extraction of resources. The burden of tributes, forced labor, and conscription has become so unbearable that the Eritrean people have started to resist against this excessive predation. In effect, the relationship between the regime and the Eritrean people has not been different from the relationship between a “predator” and its “prey”. As a predator cares less about the

welfare of its prey, Issaias and his predatory regime care less about the Eritrean people. Under this circumstance, left with no other better options, the anti-predatory strategy option of the Eritrean people has become “*physical flight*”. The mass exodus of Eritreans (particularly the youth), business enterprises and entrepreneurs, and human and physical capital during the last two plus decades is nothing but an exercise of this anti-predatory strategy on the part of the Eritrean people. In the process, the “*Eritrean Nuclear Family*” has been disintegrating and consequently, Eritrea has been dying from the resultant excessive depopulation. Today, Eritrean villages and towns are bleeding to death from out-migration of their respective native residents in general and their youth in particular. Depriving Eritrea of its native population has been one of Issaias’ main strategies to achieve his objective. The facts that transpired in recent months (during the last 8 or so months) in Eritrean and Ethiopia also attests this reality. The cost to Eritrea has been incalculable and long-lasting with dire consequences to the survival of Eritrea as sovereign country and people - in their efforts to escape from whims of the brutal regime, thousands of Eritrean youth perished in deep deserts, high seas and oceans, thousands more are languishing in refugee camps and in foreign lands and the trend has been continuing unabated. A country without the “youth” has no future because it lacks the necessary critical mass for its defense, socio-economic growth and prosperity, and to reproduce the future generation. This is exactly what Issaias has done to Eritrea.

***Holding the Eritrean People Hostage:*** Issaias and his regime also have been engaging in “*war making*” as a means of extracting resources from the Eritrean public including the Diaspora. The regime have been using, as a pretext, the fear of foreign domination, invasion, or conquest posed by an external rival, particularly by Ethiopia (the border conflict is a case in point), to racket up its extractive efforts from the Eritrea people. By increasing the political tolerance of Eritreans for sacrifices and the public’s perception of acceptable levels of tax burden, including forced labor, the border war followed by the “no peace no war” situation has given the regime the opportunity to continue preying on the Eritrean people. In the name of waging the war against the external enemy (Ethiopia), the regime has been enacting and enforcing policies, rules and regulations requiring contributions from the Eritrean people. These contributions include, but not limited to, monetary contributions, purchase of state bonds by the Diaspora, and contributions in kind such as forced labor (the indefinite national service where the recruits end up working for PFDJ or military owned enterprises for almost no pay) and the armed urban and rural elderly who are required to give local and national security services for no or meager pay. In this sinister manner, not only has Issaias been able to hold the Eritrean people hostage, but also was able to tightly control the Eritrean society through a highly militarized and top-down regimented structure. The purpose of this scheme is to create a system that can enable him to successfully flash-out any dissent or potential opposition to his grand agenda of surrendering Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia. Issaias has been using this system to cleanse all Eritreans with “national interest of Eritrea in their hearts” from his regime. The ***G-15 case*** which is widely known among the Eritrean public is only the tip of the iceberg of these kinds of heinous crimes that Issaias has been perpetrating during his long tenure in the Eritrean politics. Consequently, many nationalist Eritrean figures were summarily disappeared, imprisoned incommunicado, fled into exile, pushed out of official roles, frozen, etc. and now Issaias is thinking that he has been able to contain the “*nationalist fervor*” that has always tied his hands (been an obstacle) not to do what he always wants – “*catch and kill*” the Eritrean struggle for self-determination.

One only needs to revisit what has been transpiring concerning the Ethio-Eritrean relations during the last 8 or so months to learn about the fundamental implications of the above discussion (a sort of an exercise of “*Reverse Engineering*”). It must be noted that, all along, Issaias had to operate in a revolutionary political environment dominated by a highly nationalistic populous (cadres, leaders up to the top level, fighters, mass organizations, public) with clear vision for and uncompromising quest for the liberation of Eritrea. Hence, he knew very well that he could not hijack the EPLF and do what his implanters wanted him to do

– **“catch and kill”** the liberation struggle – before he was able to weaken and eliminate the **“national fervor”**, although he was always trying to “test the waters”. To do that, he needed to remain masked behind the **“Eritrean Nationalist Curtain”** and silently eliminating the “obstacles” to his ultimate objective – the surrender of Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia. Now, assuming that he has successfully prepared all the necessary preconditions, Issaias has unmasked himself and has started to openly take concrete steps towards achieving his ultimate goal. To mention but a few:-

- ❖ As if the Eritrean people had not fought bloody wars for decades and paid hundreds of thousands of precious Eritrean lives in search of nationhood and sovereignty as a people, in a betrayal of unfathomable proportion, Issaias said **“If there is anyone who says that the Eritrean people and Ethiopian people are different, he/she must be someone who doesn’t know history and the truth: the Eritrean people and the Ethiopian people are one and the same”**.



- ❖ Any sane mind, unless the person has sinister motives, knows that the border war with Ethiopia and the “no war no peace” situation that followed, made incalculable damage to Eritrea and its people. Issaias has, however, been heard saying **“We (Eritrea) did not lose anything during the last 25 years”**. Given now that his ultimate objective from the get go has been to “surrender Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia”, the incalculable damage that Eritrea suffered from was a necessary precondition for the achievement of Issaias’ ultimate objective and no one expects Issaias to consider it as a cost to Eritrea. But, his saying, in a way, affirms that his ultimate goal has been the “surrender of Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia”.

- ❖ As Eritreans, who are always at the receiving ends, can tell you emphatically, Issaias is very much known for his condescending speeches and contempt towards the Eritrean people. Why all that changed during his frequent recent visits to Ethiopia and his interactions with the Ethiopian people, now after the “unmaking”, is naked for everyone to see. As it can be seen from the picture on the right, Issaias was extremely happy for a reason. He thought that, finally, he could achieve the objective that he worked for almost his entire life as “undercover agent or a mole” in the Eritrean liberation struggle. It is natural and even human to be emotional, erratic and agitated under that kind of thought process – the thought of proving vindictive, successful and the idea of being invincible, powerful and big man – which constantly pushes something forcefully from inside into abrupt bursts of uncontrolled emotions of the kinds that we witnessed from Issaias’ recent dramas.





❖ Issaias has also said *“I have given you my authority: from now on wards, you (Dr. Abiy) are our leader; now that I am old and I don’t have much long time left to live; but I am content and satisfied because I am leaving Eritrea in your hands”*. Dr. Abiy is an Ethiopian leader who is leading Ethiopia. If Issaias is planning to leave Eritrea in the hands of an Ethiopian leader, he is entertaining a scenario where Eritrea is ruled by an Ethiopian leader. This is nothing short of surrendering Eritrean sovereignty to Ethiopia, to put it in a plain and simple language. After all, Issaias is more concerned about Ethiopia and he has pledged unequivocally to give his life for the cause of Ethiopia. On the contrary, Issaias has been undermining the integrity of Eritrea as a nation-state – undermining and dismantling its institutions, norms, culture, rule of law, way of life and livelihood. Now, we know that all these were done by design. For instance, Issaias is well known among Eritreans for being anti-educated and for working tirelessly to dismantle higher education institutions in Eritrea. His attitude towards higher institutions and the educated in Ethiopia is diametrically opposite. Hence, I hope you will not be surprised by the picture on the right.



There many more things to say about how Issaias betrayed Eritrea and its people in his efforts to subdue the will of the Eritrean people for self-determination as sovereign people and country. I will leave the rest for other times or for others to add, though. I am sure others, who have been around Issaias and with better and more information, can do better jobs in filling the gaps in our understanding of the burring issues in our hands. My purpose is to initiate and generate a mature discussion on the issues that matter for us – saving the Sovereignty of Eritrea and Eritrean Identity. I am just trying to *“reverse engineer”* 50 plus years of history. I started from what is going on now (what has transpired recently) and working back ward, piecing pieces of information together with contextual reasoning – *“reverse engineering”* – in trying to reconstruct the history of what might have actually happened. I am sure those who were there all along, can “engineer” it probably better because they might have all the data (the needed bricks). Given what has transpired recently, they owe ‘telling the truth” to the Eritrean people. Has Issaias been an Ethiopian Asset? You were there and tell us what you know. My conclusion from the exercise of *“Reverse Engineering”* is that *“Yes, Issaias has been a Mole Implanted in the Eritrean Liberation Struggle by Ethiopia”*.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to say the obvious – the story has both bad and good aspects. The bad one is Issaias’ evil betrayal of Eritrea as has been outlined above. The good one is the “unmasking of Issaias, the mole” which enabled the Eritrean people to see naked who Issaias has been and is and what Issaias stands for from the get go. Now, Eritreans should not make an illusion out of what they see and hear. We need to trust our eyes and our ears. Issaias is who he is as revealed recently and Eritreans are advised not to deceive themselves. Instead, we need to use this opportunity and critical juncture to save Eritrean sovereignty and the good news is that we can, provided we commit ourselves to do the right thing urgently. Let’s shelf all our differences (both actual and perceived, small or big, political, religious, ethnicity, regional or otherwise) and work in unison like a “honey-bee” to create a national framework (structure) to save Eritrean sovereignty. Our credo should and must be *“Unity of action now to save Eritrea”* and every Eritrean should subscribe to it. If you love Eritrea and its people, subscribe to this credo (ሎሚ ኤርትራ ንምድኣን ዘይመኩተ፡ ከምዘየሉን ከምዘይነበረን ኢዩ ዝቐጸር ዳርጋ ብደዉ መሸሚሹ ከምዝሞተ። I am in. What about you, readers?