The Root Grounds for Unconstructive Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea: (A pragmatic analysis)

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Abstract:
This paper is the result of a series of case studies, reports of different workshops, claim charges and their procedures conducted during different arbitrations and personal observation of the writer on the grounds of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Historically, it was due to external aggression and colonization of powerful nations (British and then Italy) that the northern part of Ethiopia (now Eritrea) became more controversial in the horn of Africa and in Ethiopia in particular. Since 19th century many political and military groups were founded especially in Eritrea province against colonization and in Tigrai against the military regime. TPLF (now EPRDF) and PFDJ/EPLF were powerful who have fought together side by side to achieve their power. But the imagination of this peaceful coexistence is not continued with the today’s reality rather they engaged with sword war in the cause of border. It is based on, the author indented to write this journal which contains the public relation of the two people and the foreign policies of the governments in different situations and mainly the cause and possible outcomes of the conflict.

Keywords: Peace, Foreign policy, border conflict, PFDJ/EPLF, TPLF/EPRDF.

1. Historical Background
As today’s bad relationship of the two closely related states, one could found two eras of historical and current relations that is the time during pre and post independence of Eritrea. Historically, Tigrigna history from Eritrea and Ethiopia, which are more than 3000 years old which is the History of Mereb Milash, Bahri Negash or Axum (the land on the red sea). In addition, what Ethiopia and Eritrea have shared history in common is that during the 3rd and 4th century AD, Eritrea was part of the kingdom of Axum which spread from Meroe in Sudan
right across the Red Sea to Yemen. The capital of Axum was in the highlands of Tigrai (now the regional state of Ethiopia), and the main port was at Adolis which is now called Zula in Eritrea. This Kingdom was based upon trade across the Red Sea and was founded by Semitic people originally from Arabia.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have longstanding relations. Peoples of the two countries are not only bounded by common mythology, legend and history but also by blood and ancestral roots. Certain commonalities and complementarities in terms of culture, way of life, language, and religion persisted so far (Kidanu Atinafu, Endalcachew Bayeh, 2015). However, (according to Kindu A. and Endalcachew B.) colonial rule that snapped Eritrea from Ethiopia disrupted the intimate relationship of peoples of the two countries. The longstanding political entrapment of Eritrea by foreign powers sowed the seeds of present-day Eritrean nationalism (cited in Lobban, 1976) and modern nationalists portrayed the propaganda of identity difference between the two peoples (cited in Ahmar, 1984).

The second historical relationship starts from April 1993 when a referendum was held in which 1,102,410 Eritreans voted; 99.8% endorsed national independence and on May 28 Eritrea became the 182nd member of the UN. Later that year, Eritreans elected their first president, Isaias Afewerki, formerly secretary-general of the EPLF. But, some individuals argue that the alternatives either for to be independent or to being colonized were not clearly stated for the people. One reason the higher bureaucrats of PFDJ were one side. Second reason the election was not fair and democratic mean that they had not enough opportunity of deciding the future of them and their country.

Basically, EPLF of Eritrean and TPLF (former Marx-Lenin league Tigrai/locally MaLeLiT) of Ethiopia were characterized by a Marxist-Leninist ideology and political pragmatism during their establishments against their common enemy the military Derg regime (the time of Mengstu Hailemariam who is now asylum in Harare, Zimbabwe). During their military struggle against Derg (autocratic ruler of Ethiopia after emperor Hailesslase), they had not strategic friendship rather they were sometimes together some time in different. That’s why they sacrificed more time (17 years) and lives to defend the autocratic ruler through military struggle from it power. The victory had become speed down because they were in different in mandatory political and economical ideologies or points. Those against the cessation agenda argued that it (Eritrean referendum) was merely the EPLF’s agenda that was carried out with TPLF. The intellectual class never demanded a public debate over the cost and benefits of independence. Different scholars conclude that the separation of Eritrea was not done in a legitimate and just manner but emphasized that people have to accept the timely reality. This behavioral and individual difference of the two political leaders continued up to the eve of independence which followed with sword war through border conflict reason.
Within a few years (after independence), however, the EPLF/PFDJ regime began to fail its promises it heightened domestic repression and returned to another devastating war with Ethiopia in 1998. Eritrea weathered through troubled relations with Sudan since 1993; an armed conflict with Yemen in 1996 over a group of Red Sea islands; a major, yet unresolved, ‘border’ conflict with Ethiopia since 1998; and border disputes and a brief armed clash with Djibouti in the late 1990s and 2008 respectively (Salih O. Nur, 2013).

According to the Ethiopian constitution article two which is practical since 1995, the territorial jurisdiction of Ethiopia shall comprise the territory of the members of the Federation and its boundaries shall be as determined by international agreements. In this case, the article become impractical through Eritrea boundary because its base which is an international agreement on the boundary could not be either legally determined or accepted in both governments.

2. Objective of this Analysis

2.1 General Objective

The general objective of this paper is to make a pragmatic analysis on the root grounds for the unconstructive conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

2.2 Specific objective

This analysis based paper contains the following specific objectives:

- To determine the grounds of the border conflict.
- To compare the strategic views of the Governments and social life of the public during the good days and during the conflict.
- To show the consequence of the conflict.
- To forward possible resolution for peace based on the current conditions.

3. Pragmatic analysis on the causes and impact of the war

According to some intellectuals, the root causes of tensions and conflicts that were deliberately created and sustained by colonial powers especially the British Empire that has deliberately sowed deadly divisions and conflicts among the people of Africa. Others are also view the main cause of the conflict between the Ethiopian state and Eritrean nationalists was mainly a result of the decision taken by Emperor Haileslase to dissolve Eritrea’s federal status in 1962 although Eritrean Historian and intellectuals could agreed on General Alula saved Eritrea’s from foreign occupation by helping military leader of Eritrea at Dogali to let alone them from colonialists. The power of British and then Italy was big relatively which was the threat of the Africa including the regime of Emperor Haileslake.

As to the amnesty report of 2001, Eritrea is a de facto one-party state, where the only party permitted is the ruling Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the re-named former Marxist-Leninist (same with TPLF under Meles late Prime minister now Hailemariam Desalegn) Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF). PFDJ/EPLF is become powerful against the ELF, ELF the National Council, ELF the United Organization, and the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement and other political parties.
“TPLF in its turn legitimized its state control in Ethiopia by presenting itself as champions of the so called suppressed ‘nation, nationalities and peoples’” wrote Zerihun Abebe under his article entitled “Ethiopia: The Pitfalls of TPLF and EPLF leadership: A Retrospective Analysis” if so ever, there were many difference among fighters of TPLF with regard such unexpected strategic military decision which is telling as the idea of Mr. Meles Zenawi. According to Aregawi Berhe in his thesis (brief profile of founders) entitled “A Political History of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilization in Ethiopia” Ideologically, he (Meles) was very Flexible, e.g., shifting from ethnic nationalism to socialist internationalism (in the MLLT) or from Maoist socialism to state-led capitalism (after 1991). This is one indicator of the timely political diversion from ethnic based political view in to nation, nationality and people based strategic view of the powerful leaders of the time.

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Ethiopia is the second most-populous country in Africa, with a population of over 90 million people by 2015. That’s why many political parties (excluding TPLF/EPRDF) criticize the current ruling party for letting Eritrea go. Neither EPRDF nor EPLF had rational and scientifically supported explanations for mandatory questions related to mutual benefit and interest of the two peoples in situation of session.

According to short abstract of Konrad Licht, 2002, entitled “The Ethio-Eritrean Relationship”, one could imagine a very harmonic relationship between these two governments - they have the same roots and if we look closer at the two parties, we will find out that they also have fought together side by side to achieve their power.

Conflict is predictable. But destructive conflict always requires preventative measures. Triggers or proximate causes determine when and how conflict may turn violent especially an inter-nations conflict. During the eve of the border conflict many differences arose between the neighbors over migration, labor, and trade. Particularly controversial was Eritrea’s introduction of its own currency in November 1997 immediately followed by different Ethiopian currency, regardless of Ethiopia’s strong complaint. Tension also developed over the use of the port of Assab, Its loss cost suddenly landlocked Ethiopia significant revenues, and dislike smoldered.

Other reason why PFDJ enter in to the border conflict was that the Ethiopian people were not truly united and could therefore be dealt with easily said some political analysis.
after the bloody war know as “sun shine operation” which Ethiopia was vectored in Geza Gebreslase, Badme. In May 1998, Eritrean forces attacked part of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border region which was the begging of the conflict. After two years war and the cost more than 70,000 lives, on June 18, 2000, Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders signed an Agreement on Cessation of fighting and on December 12, 2000, a peace agreement known as the Algiers Agreement. The EPLF-led Eritrean leaders blame their TPLF-led Ethiopian counterparts for the latter failed to enforce the Algiers Agreement and the Boundary Commission ruling. One can expect the negative outcome of war especial such unconstructively escalated war of two brothers. Ari Dybnis wrote that Eritrea claimed approximately $6 billion in damages, while Ethiopia countered with claims for approximately $14.3 billion in damages.

4. Views of the people and the politicians

In the side of Ethiopian Government, the members of the ruling party (EPRDF) and Eritrea’s ruling party (PFDJ) argue that the border conflict is people –to-people not government –to-government; the members from opposition parties said the conflict is government –to-government just ‘public diversion’ agenda of the two powerful ruling parties of the states. The externals are also concluded that there is ill feeling between the two peoples; but, this is false personal judgment since the border conflict is governments –to-government dispute, not people-to-people, the two closely in social, cultural, religious, historical and economic tied people are waiting peace and stability to move freely like the ancient time of peace. That is why the two people recommend that the two leadership should come to a table and began to sort out and discuss their issues to reach a rational and legal consensus regarding not only the border case, but also other vital matters that have greater implications to the lives of ordinary Ethiopians and Eritreans.

As to the Ethiopian Constitution Article 39(1) Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession. This is one reason that TPLF (now EPRDF) was deliberately included this article to let Eritrea independent according to some political viewers and policy analysts. Another argument against this article and Eritrea’s cessation is the question of OLF which is not allowed yet (as to the government due to lack of democratic, legal base and shortage of supporters of this political question).

Currently the people is confusing on neither peace nor war relations of the two governments. The Ethiopians’ are too busy in Developmental policies and agendas; Eritreans’ are also too busy in thinking on how they should go outside their country to change their way of life. In general, both societies could not normal and stable due to the border conflict which is now ignored issue from the public media of the two states. As the result of the bloody war, some externals perceive that the two nations could not be peaceful. But this is not the right forecasting as to the historical relation of the public. One example for this justification is the internal crisis of Ethiopia during the
military regime that the war against *Derg* (committee) was the war among the brother societies. After 17 year war, no one is charging the other rather than respecting one another.

5. The Foreign Policy Issue

Based on the Ethiopia foreign policy towards Eritrea, the maximal policy Ethiopia will pursue regarding Eritrea will come into play where the regime or its policies have been changed. This indicates that its foreign policy is accountable and transparent for mutual interest that Eritrea’s foreign policy towards Ethiopia. When Eritrea becomes the core of the conflict in the horn and across the sea, Ethiopia amended its policy towards its most nearest neighborhood state.

As to Salih O. Nur, 2013, Foreign policy of independent Eritrea hardly escaped norms of arbitrary exercise of power deeply embedded in EPLF/PFDJ’s authoritarian political culture. The foreign policy of Eritrea, a small country in the Horn of Africa, in the past two decades of its independence has been characterized by conflict and confrontation with its neighbors and other world powers.

According to Eritrea’s Response to the Report of the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group Report, the political accusation of Eritrea by Monitoring Group on points of financial support to *Al-Shabab*, sensationalized allegation of a “plot” to bomb Addis Ababa during the African Union Summit in January 2011 (‘making Addis like Bagdad’ according to the documentary film of ETV now EBC), and PFDJ/Shabiya’s support to armed groups in violence, destabilization or terrorist acts in Somalia, Djibouti,, Yemen and Sudan; Eritrea confidentially rejected the report. These and other political sanctions to Eritrean by Ethiopia, USA, AU and other concerned international organization against Eritrea are happened due to PFDJ’s not handout from political intervention in destabilizing its neighbors and the horn in general. It is the legality of one’s Foreign policy a given country could create long lasting friendship and could assure the national interest of its people. And, instead of depending on foreign Governments and Diasporas these two nations could political and economic stable from the populations within their own borders. This could be practical if one’s own foreign become modified and normalized to assure the common interest of the two people than the two elite political organizations.

6. The Contemporary Issue

As Eritrea shifts its attention to assist the opponent parties of EPRDF, the Ethiopian Government has been also helping and encouraging opponents of the PFDJ of Eritrea. Especially after the bloody border conflict not solved yet, the relationship of the two states become through the enemies which call as ‘freedom fighters’ or opponent ‘political parties’ themselves of one another. For example the Ethiopian Government (EPRDF) has been charging PFDJ as a bottleneck development for Ethiopia through political interruption by helping opposes or terrorists like *Al-shabab*, *Ginbet-7*, *OLF* and to the opponent military party of TPLF locally known as “*berekatat tigrat*”. The EPRDF is also in the right hand of opponent parties to PFDJ through
creating and allowing Medias for them. Radio Wegahta and Assena are examples who repeatedly report about the absence of Democracy and freedom in Eritrea. This is one example that Mr. Daniel Berhane interviewed Eritrean politician residing in Sweden Yonathan Sebhatu Through the Horn Affair as the claims that “the Ethiopian government is building a radio station in the north-western city, Bahirdar, for the use of the Eritrean opposition. If true, isn’t it a waste? One can’t overthrow a government through radio-waves”. Then He replied as “This is a waste of time to the opposition and Ethiopian tax payers. If the Ethiopian government honestly concern to help the Eritrean opposition, it must make a pressure on them to build one army not different ethnic grouped armies, give them the border and arms for those who are ready to defeat PFDJ, so that they launch attack and throw the regime by themselves.” The interviewer Mr. Daniel added “What do you mean by "give them the border"?” and the reply of Mr. Yonathan was “I mean where they can be active militarily. Like the PFDJ does for Ethiopian oppositionist.” But, Ethiopia’s support for the Eritrean (PFDJ oppositions) and vice versa has no long-term benefit for both parties. The other thing is that the two elites are helping political parties of the other directly or indirectly just politically although the political agenda of the antagonist is different from their ideology even in terms of national interest. Some external analysts argued that Eritrea’s relations with its neighbors, after gaining independence, have been unstable. In the process of defining the new State’s borders, the country has clashed with three of its neighbors – Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti - and maintained a complex, and somewhat ambiguous relationship with the Sudan. The good thing what the peoples of the two countries are sharing in common is missing of the peace and freedom of movement. Increasing the number of migrants through the border from Eritrea to Ethiopia due to poverty and political reasons (both side), sharing music, traditions and life style are symptoms of the brotherhood relationship of the two people. In general, these two countries of the horn have been serving as a settlement land of the enemies of one another instead of helping each other like against the military regime Derg (committee) in the struggle against poverty.

7. Summery Suggestions

Most writers and organization have been published their witness and short abstracts that Eritrea was under the colony of Ethiopia; but, this theoretical conclusions is totally different from the historical, economic, social and political relationship of the two peoples/states. The following are some of the main responsible reasons for: First, what does mean by colonization? Colonization is happened when one country’s domination of another country or people usually achieved through aggressive, often military, actions. Besides to this the Wikipedia defines as Colonization occurs whenever there is a large-scale migration of any one or more groups of people to a colonial area. The migrants, who can also be called colonizers, keep "strong links" with their previous country, and thus
obtain privileges over other people living in the area being colonized. Is this case the most famous business and entrepreneurs in Tigray (currently the Regional state of Ethiopia) and in Ethiopia-wide in general were from the northern part of the nation (now Eritrean). In terms of number and domination, peoples from Eritrean area were more powerful in different business sectors of Ethiopia. If so, by what means Eritrean was under the colony of Ethiopia after Italians. **Second,** it is controversial to say Eritrea was the colony of Ethiopia and vice versa if colonization as in terms of economic, political and social power of one nation over another nation. **Three,** there was no war between Ethiopia and Eritrean before 1991 or before Eritrea’s ceased from Ethiopia through referendum. Therefore, when was the time Ethiopia control Eritrea through war or any means of war? As a result, colonization or imperialism was not practiced on one another of these countries.

The word war and then sword war in the border conflict is might be resulted due to unhealthy political view of the two elite for Eritrea’s secession from Ethiopia before having strategic preconditions and common understanding on mutual benefit of the two people, clear demarcation of the border, future political, economic and foreign relation of the these closely linked neighborhood countries. Starting to the time when TPLF and EPLF/PFDJ were fighting together for their common enemy both of them were indifferent political behavior for their current political power beyond Marx-Leninism ideology. They were indifferent theoretical view and the geographic structure of the border was also not demarked clearly (according to them) even if the people around each border have enough witness to which territory the area could beyond. But, the powerful could not attend the idea of elders around the border. Peoples around the border have more historical knowledge on the right line based on their families’ farming land.

To sum up, the following are some of the end results of the conflict:

- Both countries have scarified millions of dollar capital and death of more than expected humans during the border conflict (*Badme, Aletena, Zalambesa, Tserona* and other military fields.
- The wealthy Eritrean business people of the good old days become destroyed from their business transaction with Ethiopia; because, the healthy relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea would bring about mutual benefits for the peoples of both countries.
- The act of theft is encouraged in the border sides especially in those whose life is leading through animal farming around *Badme, Tekeze and Mereb*.
- The states are serving as home of enemies of one another and the station of criminals of one another
- The peoples around the border are suffering badly one another due to lack of harmony and normal relationship.
• The borders were very risky due to military excavations and complicated for demonization the minefield.
• Social crises among the people. The two governments have been enforced residents who are not legal citizens of one of them.
• More than expected numbers of musicians from the Ethiopian side break the copyright and they are repeating what Eritrean musicians did with and without acknowledgement of the original owners.

At the end, the most necessary alternative is co-operation and reconciliation between the oppressed people of Ethiopia and Eritrea is freedom of collective discussion for peace and stability. And, since TPLF and PFDJ are two sides of the same coin, the people could influence the elite political leaders to end Word war and sword war between them. Besides to this, the two governments should attend the heartbeat of their people instead of waiting foreign arbitrators. The people especially those who live in the border of the two countries knows everything about and they should have a chance of discussion jointly with the elites of the two states.

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