**Eritrea: Coming out of the Shadows**

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It is easier for this generation of African Americans to forget the legacy of slavery, segregation and the hell their ancestors went through given the hectic individual life they live in. However, it is impossible to forget because the legacies are engrained into the daily life of all blacks regardless of age or status. The physical, emotional, social and legal imprints are everywhere thus impossible to miss. It is the same for every group, whether Armenian, Kosovars or Palestinians that goes through difficult circumstances as societal unit. It is also the same for Eritrea because those legacies live in every Eritrean.

Like the African Americans, Eritreans went through similar hardships in the hands colonial powers and Fascist Italians for decades. When that passed new forms of colonial legacies painted Eritrea’s history. For over a century, Eritrea faced untold hardship due to wars, colonialism, segregation and aggressions that threatened to wipe Eritrea from existence. Between 1981 until 1987, it seemed as though the enemies have succeeded to achieving their absolute control of Eritrea for the last time. At that moment in history, Eritrea arose from the ashes, dusted off, and marched to never look back. In the years that followed, Eritrea managed to wipe the enemies clear and started the history of independent Eritrea afresh from 1991. Eritrea has thus far been though four pinnacle stages of existence that the enemies said it cannot.

The first phase was that Eritrean revolutionary fighters were bandits. This was propaganda, Ethiopia pushed to downplay the Eritrean movement. By 1975, Ethiopia was forced to publicly negotiate with those that it called bandits in the doorsteps of Asmara after thousands of Eritreans joined the revolutionary struggle and after Eritreans achieved military victories against Ethiopia all over the country.

The second stage covered the period between 1975 until 1987 when the struggle was beset by civil wars and consistent attacks by Ethiopia in which the very existence of the armed struggle was tested. At one time, the entire Eritrean struggle was fortified in one area, Nakfa.

The third phase was the physical liberation of Eritrea. This covered periods from 1987 until 1993 when Eritrea’s struggle for independence was completed. During this period, EPLF liberated Massawa and that led to the complete liberation of Eritrea from the hands of Ethiopian soldiers. Soon after independence, Eritrea conducted and completed successful referendum globally with over 98% voting for independence. At that time the prevailing belief was that Eritrea cannot achieve independence let alone survive and able to run a country. Many predicted in few months Eritrea will fail and return to Ethiopia.

The fourth phase is the current phase that marks the periods from 1993 until now. During this period, Eritrea is tested in many ways and, the agenda of driving Eritrea to chaos persists to date. The most obvious being the war with Ethiopia in 1998-2000. The enemies hoped and expected, Eritrea to fail. They said Eritrea is not viable and in six months, will fall into civil chaos from hunger and starvation.

To expedite it, they conspired, hatched schemes and created economic obstacles to strangulate Eritrea. Ethiopia enlisted Yemen and Sudan to encircle and suffocate Eritrea from existence. This period tested the will of the people and their ability to persevere in many ways. This also is a period in which, sifting of ideas and people took place within Eritrea. Those that harbored ill will were exposed and in time, many of these behind-the-scene schemers were embarrassed ala Dr. Bereket Habtesselassi and Haile Mekarious.

In this phase, Eritreans made quantifiable achievements in scope and magnitude. This happened at a time of many adversities and difficulties. Eritrea’s challenges were daunting and varied. Eritrea faced economic, diplomatic, security and political... challenges that tested the will of the nation. However, Eritrea lifted the clouds of darkness in layers to see light beyond mere survival. This required, believing on each other, coordinated effort and understanding between the people and the leadership about what is at stake to challenge them head on.

The UNMEE was one challenge that Eritrea faced. In retrospect that was one monumental achievement because, it was part of the plan designed to create cracks. It was poison to a serene-proud-society and unspoiled environment. It created uneasiness because of the filthy behaviors that UN peacekeepers demonstrate everywhere. The process took its course and Eritrea used it as an opportunity to, in one-hand welcome international process and, when it failed to produce the desired outcome, to clear house and assert its position as independent nation. It was rocky but successful nonetheless. This process meant to bring peace and stability between the two nations turned out to be a tool to undermine the sovereignty of Eritrea. Eritrea overcame that issue and all the political entanglements that was part of the very process

In this period, Eritrea needed to recalibrate its approaches. The war had two major impacts in the life of the nation, i.e. economic and security amongst other priorities. Eritrea’s economy and way of life was interlinked to that of Ethiopia’s in many ways. In addition, after war broke-out, Eritrea was forced to divert valuable resources and human capacities into the war effort creating a gap in the socioeconomic infrastructure that just started to take shape after independence. Whatever gains Eritrea made in her short independent life was taken away, due to the unexpected war that took many lives and displaced millions adding another dimension to a major challenge. That challenged the very existence of Eritrea and it was a challenge enemies designed against Eritrea assuming Eritrea cannot overcome.

In 2000, just as Eritrea was coming out from the war, General Sibhat Efrem came to the US for official visit and conducted interview with the Voice of Eritrea DC (VoE) and said, “As a new nation Eritrea will be tested militarily, economically, politically, diplomatically, socially and in every conceivable way. Nations go through all types of hardships internally as have the French during the French Revolution, the US during the civil war and others. Nations that have not been tested will, at one time. And those who face the challenges head on, nations that can withstand outside pressures and, come out victorious, will enjoy their sovereign governance successfully. But those who fail will not survive as nations.”

General Sibhat then related it to Eritrean saying, “Early on, Eritrea went through various hardships due to religious, regional and political conflicts. During the armed struggle, the war between EPLF and TPLF took the life of thousands of Eritreans.” And further noted, “In Africa, most nations were handed their freedom while, Eritrea had to earn freedom with blood, guts and hard work. Eritrea was tested and we will be in the future. And if we fail in any turn we cannot be viable as a nation.” That is a mindset and that is what makes Eritrea a NATION and will remain as one.

Eritrea had four things going for it: Experienced leadership; a dedicated, experienced, educated and selfless population willing to die for Eritrea; manageably sized nation; and flexibility. These four ingredients helped Eritrea to reel from a devastating, difficult and dangerous period.

The nation focused on food security; realigned its diplomatic approach within the region and globally; strengthened its security and started to make headways in its social and physical infrastructure reconstruction. Eritreans quickly returned to a familiar mindset and hankered with the understanding that all these developments to be a continuation of the armed struggle. In a sense, the war heightened the focus on the nation and helped tighten the unity.

It is rewarding to remember the challenges Eritrea faced and how it is overcoming them. It also speaks volumes of leaders with foresight that forewarned the world about Western intention and designs to create conflicts and manage them. Eritrea was amongst the first targets of the West before the Arab Spring. With the help of the Weyane regime, they tried to isolate specific ethnic groups into uprisings. Ethiopia enlisted some failed ex-ELF and flew them from Sweden to lead Eritrea. We also witnessed some ex-ELF driven into the US State Department anointed as the future leaders of Eritrea. It all failed because Eritreans knew what they have and chose not to give it up. Eritrea was not handed to them; a ballot box did not gain Eritrea; Eritrea exists because of those that paid the price and those six feet under in every part of the nation.

Eritrea rebuffed every attempt and shined. In fact, Eritrea benefited from all the wicked attempts thrown at her. The PR, the demonizing campaign, misinformation and disinformation negative campaigns as well as the deliberate attempt to alter the history of the brave nation, failed. To the contrary, it put Eritrea on the global map faster. It killed the very agendas they were pushing forward. Eritrea came out from shadows of colonial legacies and now, the world knows Eritrea as a gritty nation that pursues prudent self-reliance programs religiously. Of course, to them it is something new but to Eritrea, it is not a choice it is a matter of survival. That’s how Eritrea came to life and how it will thrive.

Eritrea’s achievements are visible and life altering to agrarian communities that live in villages and small towns all over the country. On 21 February 2012, Eri.TV showed newly completed potable water project in Digsa, Segeneiti sub-zone. What caught my attention was how the people viewed this new achievement. Tirhas said, “Thank God, we are doing fine. We used to travel 5 kilometers for services and to fetch for water. Now we have barrels in our doorsteps.”

Mr. Ghebremichael said, “We have electricity, potable water, a hospital and schools thanks to the government of Eritrea. We used to travel 5-10 kilometers but we have all that we need here and it is up to us to safeguard and maintain them. This is not something new, this was EPLF’s stand during the armed struggle and this is a continuation of what it started during the struggle to equalize the standard of living throughout.”

This is as basic as it gets. On the other hand, Eritrea had to meet some of the major and comprehensive infrastructural needs of the country without resources and amidst a hostile environment in order to position Eritrea for the future. That is a tall order and balancing act. Eritrea met these challenges head on in a stealthy manner by exercising her advantages such as flexibility, mobility and the dedicated human resources to build the basic infrastructural needs. It was relatively seamless process because Eritrea is a nation with a history of organizing the masses into specific national goals. The people bought into it because of the awareness instilled in them during the struggle. Eritreans are confident and know they can overcome as they have during the struggle.

By hankering down, Eritrea positioned herself into the current stage where it is beginning to extract her wealth. The people of the world have noticed and Eritrea has arrived. Countries are sending their representatives not to fill-in diplomatic spaces but to do business; understanding Eritrea’s strategic importance and confident, that Eritrea is a nation they can depend on. Favorable climate, hospitable people, crime-free environment and incredible topography are other factors attracting world attention.

Conclusion

Throughout Africa, most of the nations are powder cakes. A little push they crumble. We saw it in Ivory Coast and in nation after nation where countries are crumbling and loosing sovereignty. Their wealth and resources exploited and the people going from one Western puppet to another in the name of democracy while in abject poverty. This is because, they lack connection, and a history of collective struggle between the people and those who claim to lead these nations.

The people of Eritrea offer a new and decisive departure for the norm. They provide alternatives, in a continent that long searched for model governance approaches. Eritreans did it by a motto that said, “The masses need to be aware, organize and arm.” This motto relies on Eritrea’s own recipe for success, “Self Reliance!” exercised in all aspects of life. For example, Eritrea does not depend on foreign tourist alone to expand the tourism industry because it can on Eritreans in the Diaspora to fill the gap. That bought time and gave it stability the industry needs. It is also a blessing and answer to the prayers of our fathers and mothers that worshiped faithfully in the name of the Almighty. That is what saves Eritrea from the peonage of Western criminals.

Eritrea’s stories are not told to the world because the daily issues tend to overwhelm the life of Eritrean. The stories are plentiful and colorful that the world needs to hear and read about. They are the stories of the human spirit. And only Eritreans can tell it because if they don’t the enemies will define it. Nakfa was one example that the world needs to hear and know about. It is history of war, grit, brilliance and sheer determination the world has not heard because it happened in Africa by Africans. It is a story of a victorious moment that changed the tide in a nation’s history. Conversely, it is legacy Eritreans cannot and will not overlook. While that is a physical reminder, the emotional scars live in all of us. This is a moment in history to expose it without being caught in the daily dilemmas they try to embroil us in.

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