

SOMALI SEAPORT CONCESSIONS TO ETHIOPIA! IS IT A COMMERCE OR CONQUEST?

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There are reports – that went around in Somali News Websites – on multiple seaport concessions that had recently been given to the Ethiopian Government in the Somali towns of Berbera, Kismayo, and Barawe.

These concessions, when taken at face value - especially in today's globally open market world – should have been a sound propitious business agreement between two neighboring states:

Ethiopia, on one hand - a densely populated, landlocked country that badly needs seaports - and Somalia, on the other hand - a war-torn, impoverished country that needs whatever income it can draw from its underused seaports. However, when viewed through the troubled history of this region of the world, specifically Ethiopia's historical claims of those same seaports and its long-standing imperialistic ambitions, and its currently exigencies of strategic seaports, the mention of these concessions set the alarm bells ringing aloud.



Ethiopia had long been claiming - groundless albeit - not only the ownership of those seaports, but the whole Somali territory and more. In a Memorandum to the United Nations in 1948, Ethiopia had - as quixotic as it might sound then - laid its claim as follows:

"Prior to the race of the European Powers to divide up the Continent of Africa, Ethiopia included an extensive coastline along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. It was only in the last 15 years of the 19th Century that Ethiopia had been deprived of access to the sea by loss of Somaliland and Eritrea. The first step in this direction was to seize Massawa by the Italians in 1885. This was followed by a similar seizure of the Benadir and other areas of Somaliland, as well as by series of agreements concerning Ethiopia, but in regard to which it had not been consulted. It was under these conditions that agreements were concluded in 1888, 1890, 1891, and 1894."

On leaflets showered over Eriterea by Royal Air Force at his behest in 1941, Haile Selassie called upon the people of Benadir - all Somali people as he meant – as his subjects, under the Ethiopian flag:

"Eritrean people and people of Benadir, you were separated from your mother, Ethiopia and were put under the yoke of the enemy, and under the yoke of enemy you still remain. Our cruel enemies, the Italians, have taken your green and fertile land: they prevent you from ploughing it and from grazing your cattle on it. But now the day has come when you will be saved from all the ignominy and hardship. I have come to restore the independence of my country, including Eriterea and the Benadir, whose people will henceforth dwell under the shade of the Ethiopian flag. In this struggle we are neither alone nor without arms. We have the help of Great Britain, therefore I summon you to strive to deliver yourself from the alien slavery..."

Margery Perham, a renowned historian in the History of Africa, rejected Haile Selassie's historical claim of Benadir as baseless and refuted any Abyssinian suzerainty over Benadir coast of Somalia in the retraceable history.

In 1963, at the first O. A. U. Conference in Addis Ababa, the President of Somalia, Aden A. Osman had politely raised a concern about the plight of the Somalis that were still under Ethiopia; Djibouti under France; and N.F.D. under Britain (now Kenya). The President also asserted prudently the political position of the Somali Government in that regard when he stated:

"... Ethiopia has taken possession of a large portion of Somali territory without the consent and against the wishes of the inhabitants. The present state of agitation and ferment in those areas will continue to fester, unless an equitable solution is found. If the wound is not healed, it will constitute a constant source of trouble in the region, and may affect adversely the friendly relations between the Somali Republic and her neighbors. Let there be no misunderstanding about our intentions. The Somali Government has no ambitions or claims for territorial aggrandizement. At the same time the people of the Republic cannot be expected to remain indifferent to the appeal of its brethren. The Somali Government, therefore, must press for self-determination for the inhabitants of the Somali areas adjacent to the Somali Republic. Self-determination is a cornerstone of the U. N. Charter, to which we all subscribe. If the Somalis in those areas are given the opportunity to express their will freely, the Government of the Republic pledges itself to accept the verdict."

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Tsehafi Tazaz Aklilu Habte-Wold, in complete denial of the Somalia's existence, replied to the President of Somalia:

"... I shall restrict myself to few facts, so that everyone may know the truth for once and for all. Ethiopia has always existed in history for centuries as an independent state and as a nation for more than 3,000 years. That is a fact. Second fact, the historical frontiers of Ethiopia stretched from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, including all territory between them. Third fact, there is no record in history either of a Somali State or a Somali Nation. That too is a fact."

Such Mr. Habte-Wold's response shouldn't be unexpected, even today, from the Ethiopian Prime Minister; it is from textbook Ethiopian view of Somalia; this is literally what is taught in Ethiopian schools; it shows how deeply the Somali hatred is ingrained in them; The Somali land is owned by Ethiopia and Somalis are landless nomads that cross all the borders is what is learnt by rote in their tender ages in home and school.

The facts are, however, the opposite of what Mr. Habte-Wold claimed. In his letter to the European Head of States, in 1891, Menelik—the founder of modern Ethiopia—lamented of his kingdom being, for fourteen centuries, a Christian Island in a sea of pagans, to him, Muslims were pagans:

".....Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian island in a sea of pagans. If powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator. As the Almighty has protected Ethiopia up to this day, I have confidence He will continue to protect her, and increase her borders in the future. I am certain He will not suffer her to be divided among other Powers."

When in 1887, Menelik conquered Harar—in which atrocities and orgies of rape that were committed are still vividly narrated in the Somalis and Hararians—in his letter to the British resident in Aden, he prided himself on his revenge for the sixteenth century conquest of Abyssinia by the Kingdom of Adel. His revenge for an earlier suffering of the Christianity on the Muslims now:

"...By the Grace of God I am well! Amir Abdullahi would suffer no Christians in his country. He was another Gragne. But by the help of God I fought him, and destroyed him, and he escaped on horseback. I hoisted my flag in his capital and my troops occupied his city. Gragne died. Abdullahi in our day was his successor. This is not a Muslim country, as everyone knows!"

In fact Menelik himself, never claimed Benadir Coast; but after annexing Harar in 1887, Ogaden in 1948, and Haud and Reserve Area in 1954—as the proverb said, "Appetite grows with the eating"—the Ethiopian rulers' claims over Somali soils keep increasing.

Haile Selassie, in his speech at Qabridahar on 25th Aug 1956, proclaimed that, "*Somali people were part of great Ethiopia family and future advancement of the Somalis lay with Ethiopia*".

There is no place where an Ethiopian leader ever—in power or opposition—rescinded or even gainsaid their predecessors' claims over Somali territory; this evidences how tenacious they are in their claims, yet Somalis today naively entertain themselves that-while forgetting that a fox may change its skin but never its character-Ethiopia today is a changed one.

It is an open secret that Ethiopia had and still has imperial ambitions in East Africa; and sea is *sine qua non* condition for an empire, as per the age-old proverb: "He who rules the seas, rules the land". Eritrea's secession in 1991 rendered Ethiopia a landlocked country; ironically, it has recently bought close to two dozens of ships including frigates; where these ships would dock? Which sea will the Ethiopian Navy operate on? Thus, that Ethiopia's counting on Somali waters goes without saying.

Since the fall of the Somalia's central government in 1991, Ethiopian troops-with intentions of desensitizing both the Somalis and the international community-have been on routine incursions into the Somalia until their presence on Somali soil makes news no more; in addition to that, as the proverbial wolf that was wearing the sheep's skin , they volunteered to join AMISOM-African Union Mission in Somalia—to get a legal cover up for their occupation of Somali soil while furthering their end: and such that, the A.U. has admitted the proverbial wolf into the sheep's fold.

An open door, it is said, may tempt a saint, not to mention an evil-minded imperialist. Somalis' acquiescence to, and their silence of—for it is said, "Silence gives consent"—the fate of their country internationalized, surely encourages Ethiopia's temptations to reach its long cherished imperial boundaries: the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and all territory in between.

Ethiopia, in seeking concessions in Somali seaports that it had long craved, is apparently mimicking the Imperial British East Africa Company in the 19th century, whose commercial concessions were used as a pretext for Britain's imperial conquests-*if the camel once gets his nose in the tent, his body will soon follow*, says an old adage. It astonishes, though, that Ethiopians have taken for granted that Somalis today are so conscienceless, weak in both heads and arms, and have the same mentality of their ancestors in 19th century. The veracity of this assumption depends much on how the Somalis respond to such this overture.

United we stand, divided we fall: If Somalis—as the word of wisdom says, there is no time like now-put their heads and hands together as soon as possible and take the monster by the ears, Ethiopia's assumptions might be belied and its intentions might be averted; if, however, they

play possum as they do it now, their motherland will be inherited by others and they will be condemned under foreign occupation.

Let me set one point—as extraneous as it may be—straight. Al-Shabab is more for the enemy than for the Somalis as they claim. It is just here to dehumanize, demonize, and destroy the Somali reputation (image), so that the Somalis lose their inherently human rights—*Give a dog bad name and hang him*. The brunt of its physical destructions—both in lives and properties—also falls on the Somalis. All Somalis, dead or alive, must out of their country, is its unspoken maxim.

Somalis should take these historic facts as a solemn warning; they should seriously take heed of their age-old wisdom: *Markii aan tabar hayey talo mahayn, hadda oo aan talo hayana tabar ma hayo*—Somali equivalent of, He who is not willing when he can, will not be able when he is willing.

It is said that, no gold is suffice to buy a liberty. Freedom is not given as a gift; it takes blood, sweat and tears to earn it.

Giving proper considerations to the Ethiopia's chronic malice toward Somalia, its imperialistic exigency of salt waters, and the Somalia's near death current state of affairs, it can be wrapped up that any concession to Ethiopia in Somali seaports, at this time, may sound the death knell of the State of Somalia; and it should be tantamount to a purely military tactic toward Ethiopia conquest of Somalia.

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