

- **“I conclude that Eritreans will meet these challenges with the same determination and resourcefulness that characterized their long struggle for international recognition as a sovereign nation” (Pateman, 1998)**

Having overcome countless obstacles and foiled relentless regional and international conspiracies for the last eight decades, the Eritrean people and government have situated themselves in a favorable diplomatic, political, financial and military position. Thus, the government and people of Eritrea are well poised to consolidate their hard-won achievements and pursue their national reconstruction and social justice programs with more vigor and resolve. It is, therefore, incumbent upon every Eritrean to hone his or her historical insight into the unique political, social and psychological experiences that produced a distinctively strong nation and state.

If one were to objectively analyze the history of every UN member state, one would find that a few would be characterized by their long history of racism, persecution of their minority populations, oppression of peoples in far-away lands and unfettered exploitation of their human and natural resources, and even acts of genocide against indigenous populations to advance and protect their geopolitical and economic interests. By contrast, the Eritrean people have, for the last eight decades, been a victim of appalling injustice and persistent political, diplomatic and economic conspiracies at the hands of superpowers of various stripes and their regional allies. Hence, the characteristics that best describe Eritreans, as a result of the aforementioned experiences, are resilience, tenacity, self-reliance and unflinching commitment to high moral standards notwithstanding the overwhelming odds stacked against them.

Italy's racist policy and actions in Eritrea have been well documented. For instance, in the late nineteenth-century, rabid Italian officials and officers went on a campaign to hunt, detain, torture and kill innocent Eritreans in Massawa based on fabricated charges of political subversion (Bruner, 2017). As the British retained much of the Italian colonial system and personnel, a willful collusion with racist Italian officials in the commitment of additional unprovoked atrocities against innocent Eritrean civilians was common practice (Almedom, 2006).

From the outset, it was clear that the intentions of the British were not to liberate nor advocate for the self-determination of Eritrea. Upon their victory against the Italians in Keren in March of 1941, British officials displayed at best a condescending and at worst a visibly racist behavior toward Eritrean civilians who, true to their tradition, greeted them with immense deference and kindness. The betrayal of trust that the British displayed towards the Eritrean people is demonstrated by the content of the leaflets they disseminated to the Eritrean population

(Pateman, 1998)

“Eritreans! You deserve to have a flag! This is the honorable life for the Eritrean: to have the guts to call his people a nation “

The unprovoked violence against innocent Eritrean civilians continued unabated even during the British Military Administration (BMA) as illustrated in the Aba Shawl incident of May 1941 in which dozens of innocent civilians were terrorized and murdered in a house to house raid (Almedom, 1996). Furthermore, the British seemed bent on destroying Eritrea both as a political and economic entity. For instance, in August of 1944, Stephen H. Longrigg, the Administrator of the BMA, wrote a highly provocative editorial opinion piece entitled “Some thoughts on the future of Eritrea” in the Eritrean Weekly News (EWN) under an assumed authorship of “Hade Eritrawi”, (one Eritrean male). falsely claiming that he was an Eritrean highlander. In the article where Longrigg falsely poses as “an Eritrean Highlander”, he argues:

“ The middle and highland part of Eritrea with its Tigrigna-speaking inhabitants should be united with Ethiopia and receive British aid and support.... The people of the lowlands would probably be happy and grateful to be joined with the people of the Sudan” (**Almedom, 2006**)

As was the case in other British colonies¹, Longrigg's malicious intent was to sow discord among Eritrean nationals through a “divide and rule” or “divide and conquer” strategy. Some actually suspected Ato Woldeab Woldemariam, the editor of the Tigrigna edition of the newspaper, as the author of the infamous and incendiary letter (Almedom, 2006).

British determination to destroy Eritrea continued as it methodically undermined its relatively vibrant economy by dismantling its main industries and infrastructure. The political and economic steps taken by the BMA had as their main objective the destruction of this nascent nation and thus “prove” to the international community that it cannot be a “viable” nation-state. However, such obstacles did not preclude Eritreans from forging a fledgling but discernible sense of national sentiment developed through a persistent struggle against racial discrimination, colonial oppression and political intrigues.

Unable to make headway with its malicious intent, the BMA proceeded to introduce another devious scheme aimed at literally mutilating the country and undermining the Eritrean people's

sustained resilience to forge an Eritrean nation-state. With the full support of the US Administration, the Foreign Ministers of the UK and Italy, Ernest Bevin and Count Carlo Sforza respectively, introduced the Bevin-Sforza plan to the UN General Assembly on May 10, 1949. The “plan” proposed for the partition of Eritrea between the Sudan and Ethiopia.

Although several versions of the plan were voted on, a definitive recommendation on the future status of each former Italian colony could not be arrived at. Finally, when a decision was made to vote on the plan as a complete package, it was rejected by 37 votes against, 14 in favor and 7 abstentions. While the real intent was to try to wipe Eritrea off the face of the earth, the preposterous British “rationale” was articulated in the following statement that can be found on page 14 of a memorandum written by the Secretary of State Affairs to the British Cabinet on the 18th of April, 1946 (AGE, 2010)

-“ Eritrea is.... ethnically disunited and economically non-viable, there is no good reason for preserving it as an administrative unit under any form of administration, whether under Individual Trusteeship or restored Italian rule. The right solution would seem to dismember it along natural lines of cleavage. “

The British became very incensed in the aftermath of the Bevin-Sforza plan fiasco and proceeded to formulate other schemes that would make it impossible for the emergence of an Eritrean nation-state. So, on September 6, 1950 in a British Cabinet meeting Chaired by the Prime Minister the following absurd statement was formulated (AGE, 2010)

-“It had become clear that there was no likelihood of the adoption by the United Nations of the solution which the United Kingdom Government had hitherto advocated..... should the Interim Committee [of the UN] reject the draft resolution [for the federal arrangement], the Government should remain free to return to advocating the former policy of partition”

In the meantime, the US administration introduced a Federal Arrangement against the expressed wishes of the Eritrean people in order to benefit, as the then US Secretary of State, JF Dulles succinctly put it, the “overriding strategic interests of the USA”.

Eventually it became obvious to all Eritreans that the UN proposal was nothing but a ruse to

gradually eradicate both the collective national consciousness, and the modicum of statehood necessary for Eritreans to exercise their inalienable right for self-determination. Soon after, the UN General Assembly voted to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in December of 1950, Haile Sellasie's ravenous desire to gobble up Eritrea became apparent. He committed several violations of the Federal Act in a blatant defiance of international law. To cite just a few examples: lowering of the Eritrea flag, placing strategic administrative structures under firm Ethiopian control and imposing Amharic, an alien language to Eritreans, on the population.

However, as the Eritrean struggle for self-determination intensified and became increasingly popular, the Emperor, decided that it was time to abrogate, illegally that is, the Federal Act. Eritrean resistance was met with a sustained and pervasive campaign of intimidation and violence by Ethiopia. The British Foreign Office, determined to dismember, kill and erase Eritrea from the map, sent Frank S. Stafford² to Eritrea in order to disrupt the pro-independence campaign (Pateman, 1998). On November 13, 1962 a motion to dissolve the federation was defeated four times³. The Eritrean Assembly, which had been surrounded by the Ethiopian Second Division under the command of General Abbiye Abebe, took no vote on November 14. Instead, Asfaha Woldemichael, the Emperor's right hand man in Eritrea, merely read a statement in Amharic prepared for the emperor several weeks in advance by his advisor, John Spencer, requesting the Assembly to dissolve the federation and unite Eritrea with its "motherland" Ethiopia (Pateman, 1998)

Eritreans had put up sustained and stiff resistance against Italian race-based discrimination, land expropriation and failed attempts at religious conversion. They foiled British strategy to destroy Eritrea and US machinations to deprive them of their well-deserved right to self-determination. When all peaceful means of resistance were exhausted, they resorted to armed struggle in September 1961 against successive Ethiopian regimes that were the beneficiaries of consistent financial, diplomatic and military support by the West (1953-1975) and the Soviet Bloc (1975- 1991).

The creation of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in 1970 had taken the independence movement to a higher level politically, socially and militarily. So, such intrigues did not break the indomitable Eritrean spirit as Eritreans persevered in their struggle for self-determination with stronger conviction and resilience. Furthermore, the EPLF developed and instilled among Eritreans through persistent education what (Doyle, 1996) calls core values. Here is a summary of the core values:

- **Adherence to high moral and ethical standards even in victory and setbacks. For instance, despite the fact that Ethiopia committed atrocious crimes on Eritreans, the EPLF treated Ethiopian POWs in a humane manner;**

- **Use of public meetings o both at home and in the Diaspora to critically discuss and reach a consensus on political and social matters;**

- **Instilling perseverance o among the entire spectrum of the population as exemplified during the struggle for independence and the equally important task of national re-construction;**

- **Promoting and embracing, both individually and collectively, the concept of self-reliance. This was and continues to be a critical factor both during the war for independence and the post-independence national re-construction endeavor;**

- **De-emphasizing pursuit o of individual life goals and objectives in favor of developing a genuine sense of responsibility and concern for the family, community and the nation.**

- **The individual and collective adoption of such values and their daily practice during the protracted and bitter struggle for independence and defense of territorial integrity and sovereignty have contributed to a collective supra-religious and supra-ethno-linguistic national identity (Doyle, 2006; Garcetti, 1999).**

That is why the collective Eritrean national consciousness today is cohesive and transcends religious and ethno-linguistic identity. It is worth noting that many developed and developing countries are yet to fully achieve this level of collective national consciousness (Chua, 2018; Garcetti, 1999).

So, it is within the historical-political context highlighted above that the hostilities against Eritrea in the last two decades spanning from 1998 to the signing of the Peace agreement in July 2018 between Eritrea and Ethiopia should be analyzed. Needless to say, for certain Western countries this has clearly been a case of unfinished business.

For the present day equivalent of Longrigg, Stafford, Dulles and Spencer like Susan Rice, Jenday Frazer, James Bevan, Chris Mullen to name a few, the existence of a viable Eritrean nation-state has been a hard pill to swallow. So, they have left no stone unturned to wreak havoc within the population and destabilize the government. Without even an iota of verifiable

evidence, they have been accusing the Eritrean government of destabilizing the region and, as preposterous as this may seem, committing grave human rights violations against its own people.

If these countries were so concerned about human rights violations and the supremacy of law, why did they remain silent when the Ethiopian regime expelled 70,000 Eritreans women, children and the elderly (as well as Ethiopians of Eritrean descent) after illegally expropriating their hard acquired material and financial assets; when it desecrated a martyr's cemetery, a symbol of Eritrean resistance, sacrifice and resilience.

Furthermore, their inaction and hypocrisy was remarkable when the human rights of the entire Eritrean population were violated because of Ethiopia's refusal to honor its obligation to the final and binding decision of the Eritrean Ethiopian Border Commission (EEBC). In fact, the British, as in the past, tried to appease and, thereby, embolden the Ethiopian regime to defy the international community. For instance, James Bevan, the British Director for Africa, stated that he would not "shoot Ethiopia on the head" for not accepting the decision of the EEBC. Similarly, Chris Mullen, the British Minister for Africa, coined the phrase "accepting in principle" that was employed by the regime in Ethiopia to hoodwink the international community (AGE, 2010).

Post-Independence saw the continuation of British hostilities against Eritrea. Suffice it to mention a few examples: Patrick Gilkes who served as advisor to the Ethiopian regime, wrote several articles disparaging the Eritrean people's struggle and questioned Eritrea's nationalism. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair appointed Meles Zenawi to the Commission on Africa in 2004 despite lingering questions about the genocides committed in the Gambela, Ogaden and Oromia regions of Ethiopia.

The UK Parliamentary Group led by Baroness Glinnock has launched several attacks on the Government of Eritrea. Eritrea Focus is also another group with links to Glinnock that has organized conferences and published defamatory articles on Eritrea. The British Press led by the BBC continue to produce mal-information on Eritrea and its leadership. Several Eritrean NGOs financed by various UK agencies have also contributed to the negative narratives on Eritrea.

The main objective of this article is not to delve deeply into the protracted and complex history of resistance the Eritrean put up against European colonialism and its intrigues to eradicate Eritrea as a nation-state. There is an abundant number of Eritrean and non- Eritrean historians

who shouldered that responsibility with eloquence and authenticity. So, its modest objective is to highlight a long and consistent anti-Eritrean political and diplomatic conspiracy by certain countries spanning more than three quarters of a century. The Eritrean people, in characteristic fashion, are not going to ruminate over the past but will focus on the future. Despite persistent external intrigues, the Government of Eritrea has today earned the respect and admiration of the peoples and governments of the region because of its integrity and vast experience in regional and international diplomatic and political affairs.

In the aftermath of Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, bold and historic declaration that the Government of Ethiopia would unconditionally accept the EEBE's final and binding decision, a new sense of hope towards a peaceful co-existence through an economic and diplomatic cooperation between the two peoples has prevailed. The new realities have also enhanced the prospects for, and augur well for a meaningful regional cooperation. In the event, lingering hostility in certain quarters will only constitute a nuisance that cannot derail the tempo and positive regional dynamics set in motion due to the resilience and vision of the principal stakeholders.

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1 Forty thousand British officers and soldiers governed approximately 200 million Indians for 200 years!

Chua, A. (2018). They conducted a thorough ethnographic study to identify the fault lines and sow discord within the Indian population For the same nefarious intention in 1944 S.F. Nadel completed an ethnographic study and wrote a report entitled " Races and Tribes of Eritrea" under the auspices of the BMA.

2 He was a civilian with an honorary military title of Brigadier General who represented the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME).

3 For the purpose of historical record, it is noteworthy that Eritrean women could neither vote nor seek a seat during the elections for the Eritrean Assembly