

Berhanu Nega: A hired gun?

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It was few weeks ago that we saw Egypt's politicians plotting on Ethiopia.

In the meeting called by President Mursi, several politicians suggested ways to destabilize Ethiopia assuming that they are in a secret meeting. But it was live on tv and later uploaded on YouTube.

In the meeting, Younes Makhoun, leader of an ultra-conservative Islamist party, said:

"[We should] strengthen the relations [Egypt's] with African countries, particularly Eritrea, Somalis and Djibouti.

We should use pressure cards...for example, there are the Oromo people, 35% of the Ethiopian population, and they have a thing called Oromo Liberation Front. The Ethiopian internal front is very weak, fragile.

There is also the Ogaden Liberation Front, it is possible to support them. This is considered a pressure card on the Ethiopian government" (Awate.com)

Similarly, Dr. Ayman Nur, a leader of liberal party and jailed under former President Hosni Mubarak's regime, suggested:

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"...dealing with Eritrea, dealing with Djibouti, and dealing with Somalia is a card of great importance to pressure Ethiopia.

Truly, we haven't used the opportunity from the change that happened after the passing away of this man [Meles Zenawi] who was very bad towards Egypt. He was inimical and agitated his people with grudge and hate towards Egypt.

I think the political changes inside Ethiopia makes me say that pressure from the neighboring countries is an important issue with another team that works with countries that have relations with the issue

There are many conflicts, there are many political forces, there are expected changes...and it is possible to deal with it.. we do not want an embassy in Ethiopia, we need a task force in Ethiopia...political, intelligence, to deal in all aspects with the Ethiopian reality, we have to have a role in it.

I think this....to interfere in internal issues there must be an interference in national affairs. Ethiopia's society is worn to the extreme, we have seen this in our visit, it was a sorry situation. Using that we can achieve a result, a very quick one." (Awate.com)

Other participants of the meeting made similar remarks, but some took rational positions.

The destabilizing methods suggested on the meeting were not surprising to Ethiopians. These method have long been used by previous

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governments of Egypt.

Indeed, Egypt have given more and more rational and cooperative signals after the downfall of Hosni Mubarak's regime. Its government mostly avoided hostile statements in public.

However, at the same time, it is observed that Egypt regresses to the old failed approach now and then. Officials with Mubarak-era mentality still exist at different levels of the Egypt government.

More importantly, Egypt is a protracted transition and daily political turmoil. Decisions are not consistent and centralization is missing on many areas.

Thus, in the absence of clear Nile policy, Ministerial offices and security departments can do things that are not fully and thoroughly examined by all relevant organs of the government.

Therefore, the remarks on that meeting of Egypt politicians raised questions. Are the destabilization suggestions simply proposals floated by war-mongering politicians who still think in Mubarak-era mode? Or, does it indicate something that is actually taking place?

A news in Egypt newspapers a few days after the meeting seems to indicate the second option may be true. I found the following translated news last month on Daniel Berhane blog last month. It says:

"(Elwata News reported): There is anger in the corridors of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, after President Morsi and a number of political forces discussed live on air political issues that

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would harm Egyptian national security.

The intelligence chief expressed his protest about the meeting to the President.

The intelligence chief expressed his anger to President Morsi on what discussed about the Renaissance dam and transmitted directly on television, stressing that the transmission of the discussion hurts all arrangements carried out politically and disturbs what Egypt had planned to deal with the issue of the dam."

It is difficult to know what is actually going on in the offices of Egypt officials.

We can not expect to find from internet or on newspapers a letter signed by a military of intelligence official giving an order to destabilize Ethiopia or similar things, as such evidences would be guarded as top national secret for anyone.

Therefore, what we should do is connecting the dots, based on the information we have.

In fact, Egyptian officials may not need to be actively plotting something.

There are others who would take the initiative to consult them and offer their service. For example, we read last April that top Eritrea officials have flown to Cairo. The news on Egypt government website said:

"President Mohamed Morsi held a meeting with Eritrean Presidential Advisor Yamani Jibrab and Foreign Minister Othman Saleh on

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means of promoting bilateral ties.

The meeting tackled the file of Nile water along with discussing regional and international issues of mutual concern, said a statement released by the Presidency.

Morsi praised the Eritrean stance that supports the Egyptian historic rights in Nile water.

Morsi said he is looking forward to holding a meeting with Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr received Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Eritrean Presidential Advisor Yamani Jibrab."

Everyone knows that Eritrea's dictator doesn't spend much time planning on improving trade and investment, except for the few gold mining areas being managed by western companies and except for importing of military equipments.

After all, for Isaias Afeworki, economic planning means plotting ways of robbing the people, by extorting the diaspora, devising schemes of unfeasible public sale of shares, etc.

Moreover, if Isaias wanted boosting trade and investment relations, he would have worked on improving his relations with the neighboring countries and especially with the fast growing economy of Ethiopia rather than going all the way to Egypt where the economy is in crisis.

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There should be no doubt that Isaias sent his officials to Egypt for his rent-seeking objectives. He certainly hopes to collect some rent from Egypt by re-affirming "Eritrean stance supports the Egyptian historic rights in Nile water."

What we didn't know was whether Isaias received a positive reply as well as the funds, equipments, etc. for assist his regional destabilization works.

Did he get approval and the things he requested? Or, did they tell him to wait? That was the question on everyone's mind.

It was while we were asking these questions that we learned Berhanu Nega, chairman of the terrorist group Ginbot 7, received 9.5 million birr from an audio recording that was leaked to AwrambaTimes.com and shared across the social networking websites and the internet in general

According to Sudan Tribune:

"The Eritrean government has offered \$500,000 to Ginbot 7, an exiled Ethiopian opposition political organisation designated by Ethiopia as terrorist entity, according to a report on a US-based Ethiopia opposition media outlet.

In an audio recording of an interview with the group's chairman, leaked to AwrambaTimes.com, Berhanu Nega admits that he received the the funds."

Sudan Tribune added: "although the United States is the front runner in the battle against terrorism, the country however is sheltering terrorists like

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Berhanu Nega."

From the audio recording, we understand that Berhanu Nega presented his 6 months workplan to Eritrea government officials.

Berhanu says, he was accompanied by three colleagues, when he went to present his workplan and receive the money. He said the main official was not present, so the deputy attended the meeting. Berhanu didn't disclose the location, but it seems logical that it would be in Asmara.

In an audio recording, Berhanu Nega says the budget has been approved and the meeting went cordially, "very smoothly and very positively". Of course, neither the employer nor the employee want to lose one another.

At the end of the meeting, when Berhanu Nega co. thanked the officials for the money, the official reminded them the relation of their nature. The official told Berhanu Nega that it is not gift rather payment.

The official reminded Berhanu Nega that Eritrea is doing this for her own sake, so it is Eritrea who should be thanking.

Yes, that is what Berhanu admitted on the audio recording. But we can be certain Eritrea's official would remind Berhanu Nega the cash flow will continue only if he delivers substantive result, since there are several other opportunists like Berhanu Nega who wish to get the money.

The audio recording proved what many people already knew. That Berhanu Nega is a hired gun of Eritrea.

However, there are two major questions that kept pundits and others keep

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asking since the release of the audio.

First, who is the real source of the money?

Second, what will Berhanu do with the money?

Who is Berhanu's employer?

Anyone who knows about Eritrea's current situation understands that President Isaias Afeworki can not throw 9.5 million Birr (500,000 dollar) every six months. That is 19 million Birr per year!

In fact, Eritrea's dictator is in trouble with many western countries, since they prohibited him from extorting money from Eritrean diaspora.

Isaias is so desperate for money that his Ambassadors continued money extortion by holding unofficial meeting with the diaspora and saying (as CBS reported):

“What we are saying is that you have to fulfil the law of the country to be an investor because you are a citizen of the country. Therefore, since what it comes down to is national honour and law, any service that requires a permit will have to remit two per cent.”

An Eritrean told CBS that: “You have to go to the consulate and they arrange how you have to pay the money. They want two per cent ... they don't give you a reason. You have to pay the money. My family [in Eritrea] would get in trouble if I don't pay,”

Isaias Afeworki couldn't stop the money extortion and for that reason

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Canada publicly expelled his Ambassador last month.

So, can Eritrea spend 19 million Birr per year for Berhanu Nega?

You will have to multiply this number atleast by ten or twenty because Eritrea has other terrorist and insurgent groups targeting Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti.

There are atleast ten Ethiopian groups on Eritrea's payroll: EPPF, ONLF, two or three factions of OLF, TPDM, APDM, groups formed in the name of Benshangul, Gambella, etc.

Some of the groups such as OLF, ONLF, EPPF, TPDM may get higher budget than Berhanu Nega since they have some fighters on the ground and attempt attacks on Ethiopia now and then.

Though they have few fighters and their terror missions often fail as soon as they cross Ethiopia's border, they are atleast bigger than Ginbot7. Whereas, Ginbot 7 is still trying to form a ganta(15 fighters team), as we learned from Berhanu's speech in the audio recording.

Therefore, the total fund for these ten Ethiopian groups could be no less than $10 \times 19\text{million Birr} = 190,000\text{ million Birr per year}$.

Mind you, Isaias is no fool when it comes to money. He learned in pain that Ethiopia is not easy to destabilize. He knows these groups cannot be expected to bring much result. He keeps using these groups because he has no other option and because he needs to tell his supporters that he is doing something about Ethiopia.

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Moreover, there are other individuals and groups that are hosted by Eritrea to destabilize the horn of Africa. They too need money!

So, it doesn't require a PhD to figure out that Eritrea is not the source of the money.

In the old good days of Isaias Afeworki, there was the notorious Libyan leader Mohammed Gadafi who would bankroll Isaias just because the Gadafi loves creating havoc. But Gadafi is no more. And, Libya has no real geo-political interest to keep Isaias Afeworki on her payroll.

The other financiers of Isaias was Qatar. But she has recently improved relations with Ethiopia. Recently, Qatar has been pressuring Isaias Afeworki to start negotiating with Ethiopia without preconditions. Qatar's Emir, several ministers and business men conducted several visits to Ethiopia. It doesn't seem that Qatar would pay hundred millions for groups that would bomb Qatari investments in Ethiopia.

The third one is Egypt. Though the relation between Ethiopia and Egypt had seen much improvement since the downfall of Hosini Mubarak, it is not certain if they halted their unholy covenant with Isaias Afeworki. The reports we read at the beginning of this article shows there are still sections of Egypt government who have a Mubarak-era mentality.

Isaias Afeworki is certainly willing to implement such Mubarak-era tactics and collect rent in the process.

Berhanu Nega publicly confirmed last week on ESAT that he doesn't care if the source of the money is Egypt. He said several times: "I will accept

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money from anyone willing to pay". In short, "I am a hired gun"!

So, it seems logical that Berhanu Nega's payment came from Egypt via Eritrea.

Who is Berhanu's local agent?

From the audio we learned how Berhanu Nega plans to spend the money.

Berhanu said that out of the total 19million Birrr budget of six months: About 4 million Birr is for ESAT's six month budget, another 4 million Birr will be used for "military and intelligence activities".

These two are expected spending areas.

It has been known for long that Ginbot7 owns ESAT tv, radio and website. No one can be fool to think that ESAT's cost can be covered by dollars collected from the few vocal diaspora, which is divided into several parties who all ask for money!

So, since ESAT is the only real visible "achievement" of Ginbot7, Berhanu needs to continue covering its budget and transmitting the destabilizing propoganda.

The second area of speending is, according to Berhanu Nega, "military and intelligence activities". That is for terror plots, for Ginbot7 popular force, which is still on papers, and other related destabilizing missions.

The third area of spending, however, is intriguing.

Sudan Tribune observed:

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"In the leaked recording, Nega also said that \$100,000 will be used to finance what he said was to a peaceful struggle and diplomacy activities.

However it is not clear how the group is going to execute a peaceful struggle inside Ethiopia, where it is a banned organisation."

So, how does Berhanu Nega to conduct his "peaceful struggle" in Ethiopia? Who is his proxy in Ethiopia?

There are several speculation in this regard.

Some guess it could be Andinet party, since its leaders used to work with Berhanu Nega. It is also observed at several times the diaspora wings of Andinet teamup with Ginbot7 on occasions. For example in this video (http://www.diretube.com/ethiopian-news/lidetu-ayalew-talks-about-his-trip-to-london-video_60df769c4.html) indicates brother of Ginbot7's deputy chairman and members Andinet allied to disrupt a meeting in London.

Andinet party's announcement to collect one million signature against the anti-terrorism proclamation raised eye brows. If the plan is real, how will Andinet cover the cost of such a massive campaign?

It is presumable that Berhanu Nega would be interested on this project since he is convicted to death by that proclamation. Berhanu Nega may hope for the release of his accomplices such as the former military officers who attempted to conduct bombings and assassinations in 2009 are convicted by that proclamation. Andinet party newspaper writes about those convicts in a good way as if they are victims.

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The destination of the 100,000 dollars could be other parties, such as Semayawi party which showed its readiness to pick any agenda for the sake of cheap political gain.

Berhanu Nega may spend the money on facebook and YouTube hoping to imitiate the revolutions in Arab countries. We already see hundreds of fake facebook and youtube accounts and blogs spreading fake news, photo and videos.

At any rate, it is petty that Berhanu Nega chose to be a hired gun and to recruit others in the name of peaceful struggle. He should have been assisting the economic stride of his country rather than plotting to sabotage it.

Berhanu Nega may not like it but the peoples of Ethiopia will continue their march forward which was confirmed by the recent World Bank report that as:

"Over the past decade, Ethiopia has attained high economic growth, averaging 10.7 percent per year. In 2012, Ethiopia was the 12th fastest growing economy in the World. If the country continues its historically impressive growth performance, it could potentially reach middle income status by 2025, according to the latest Ethiopia Economic Update report. This, in turn, may require an adjustment in economic policy to phase in the private sector as an additional engine of growth."

Berhanu Nega should soon return to his senses rather than saying "I will

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accept money from anyone willing to pay" and acting as a hired gun.

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