

## **CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSFER OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN ERITREA**

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It is usually possible, if not with certainty, to predict any future events based on historical facts. To predict what is going to happen in any situation depends upon our recollection of the matter and critical analysis on the trends and patterns of what has happened over time. It is normal to try to find out the fate of a business, or even a country, by asking appropriate questions and making proper analysis. For instance, to find out the fate of a business we may ask, what will happen to the business when the owner retires or passes away? If it is a well-established business, the likelihood that it would continue to survive is great. Similarly, to have a fair idea about the fate of a certain country, we may need to ask, what will happen to the country when the current leader is ousted by the people's uprising, or if summoned by the Almighty God in a natural death? In view of the fact of life, it is a tragedy to observe leaders like Mummer Gadhafi, Saddam Hussein, Siyad Barre, Hussam Mubarak, Robert Mugabe, and Omar Al Bashir were removed from their political posts by popular revolt with disgrace and humiliation. These leaders, either they did not have decent or democratic government system established or they might have purposely and deliberately abolished all the necessary appropriate political infrastructure and proper institutional formations to ensure and serve their dictatorial rule. The structured political institutions and procedures could have helped them to prepare legitimate deputies to take over the political power and normalize the horrible situations in their respective countries. These leaders assumed that they would stay in power indefinitely without any problem. They had never expected that they would be removed by force from their political posts by their own people. They may have thought that they were indispensable. Consequently, Somalia and Libya are divided and subdivided by some hostile clans or factions who led them ultimately to becoming fallen states. Egypt and Sudan fell under the military rule by taking advantage of the popular uprisings. Syria, Iraqi and Zimbabwe are still in political turmoil and suffer from economic disasters. Obviously, the Eritrean people nor those from any other country in the world would not like to be in such undesirable and deplorable political situations. The People of any country would benefit from a peaceful transfer of political power when a change of political leadership happens. For that matter, no country gains from any unnecessary bloodshed, turmoil, chaos and disarray that can happen in the transfer of political leadership. Subsequently, the lingering effect of an explosive political situation as mentioned above, could lead to social and economic disasters.

It is important to know for sure that we cannot run away from natural death. No matter how great and powerful we may consider ourselves, we cannot cheat or avoid death and try to live forever. Kings and queens, rich and poor, young and old, men and women, and all noble and ordinary people pass away either with dignity or humility when the train of death comes to collect its passengers. At one point in time, one by one, everybody departs to heaven or hell, depending upon the judgment of the divine power based on our personal deeds or crimes we might have committed on the surface of the earth. The only thing predictable with certainty in this world is that death is inevitable. We need to be realistic and accept the fact that death usually comes after life and we will all encounter death someday. It is also a fact of life that sooner or later for one reason or another the PFDJ leader and his clique will face death. It is nobody's choice to face death; it is just the normal course of life. Given the prevailing unpleasant socio-economic and political situations of the country, what is going to happen to Eritrea after the departure or removal of the PFDJ leadership? Will it be a fallen state like Somalia or Libya? Will it be in turmoil for years like Syria, Iraqi, or Zimbabwe? Who will likely take over the political power and lead the people of Eritrea in peace and harmony? Do

our military officers have the political power to take over the situation like the military establishments in Sudan and Egypt? It is evident that like the political situations of the countries mentioned above, Eritrea does not have the necessary political infrastructure and proper institutional formation established that could provide suitable background for the peaceful transfer of political leadership when the departure time comes to the PFDJ leader. The most frightening situation now is that if a political power vacuum is created in the country after the death or removal of the current PFDJ leader by any means, who would be the right person at the right time with support of the people of Eritrea to genuinely and effectively lead the nation and defend the sovereignty and independence of the country? We need to address this question immediately without any reservation and analyze the current situation of Eritrea together in unity and peacefully with open minds. It is critically important to prepare a conducive and suitable environment for a smooth transition of political leadership in Eritrea before it is too late. To this effect, it is necessary to evaluate several scenarios as narrated below which have the potential to adversely affect the transfer of political power in Eritrea.

It is possible that a political power vacuum may be created after the departure of the PFDJ leadership. Currently, PFDJ as a separate political entity does not have a powerful political function capable to inherit and sustain the legacy of popular name of EPLF. It has failed terribly in retaining and maintaining the political clout, discipline, and leadership charisma of EPLF. Under the PFDJ rule it has been observed that Eritrea is characterized by deeply rooted poverty, inadequate basic public services, the constantly declining standards of education programs and health care services, the dissipating fundamental quality of life, the constantly shrinking economic base, and the absence of the rule of law. In addition, there is declining or disappearing human capital formation caused by mass out-migration of the most productive and progressive young population. The PFDJ leadership is so out of control ruling the country without law and order. It is so engaged in public intimidation, youth harassment, disruption of the social fabrics of the country, and interference in the affairs of religious institutions. It has secured the political power to abuse in the country without regards to humane concerns and the welfare of the Eritrean people. Putting into proper perspective the above-mentioned undesirable situation of the country, the PFDJ political regime does not have the people's support to pursue the political leadership in the country. Its future survival and sustenance as a viable political entity in the country does not seem to prevail anymore because it has already lost its potential constituency, credibility and transparency a long time ago. The downfall of the PFDJ leadership would probably lead to the disintegration and disappearance of PFDJ as a political entity. Currently, it is temporarily surviving with humility by the forced guard of the military and the little support of its few misguided members. There is no now for PFDJ to seek and rally the support and integrity of the people of Eritrea in the transfer of political leadership in Eritrea. It could avoid any unnecessary and undesirable situations and circumstances from happening, if the PFDJ leadership peacefully submits its political power to the Eritrean people before it is too late.

If a political power vacuum is created in Eritrea, what is the probability that the military would take over the political leadership? The military faction in Eritrea, composed of divided and fragmented constituents, has not developed the reputation and self-esteem to be a powerful and independent military establishment over the years. Even though political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, the military has not yet demonstrated its political influence to have and secure the potential of taking over the political power of the country. It does not have prior experience at a national level in taking over a political power of the country. The military functions under the direct order and strict command of the office of the PFDJ leadership. A few corrupt senior military leaders who are intoxicated with political power are ardent

supporters of the PFDJ regime and they generate economic benefits by abusing their military power. From time to time, some senior military officers are put in prison and the rest of them remain silent and inactive perhaps for fear of intimidation and character assassination by the PFDJ leadership. The generals and other senior officers of the military do not seem to have the unity and cohesion among themselves to come together in a formidable institutional formation to lead the country. So far, they do not have the political clout and public support to be the pioneers in filling in, if by any chance a political power vacuum is created, unless by miracle some progressive and prominent junior officers suddenly appear like Wodi Ali to take over the political leadership by force. It is always possible that some powerful young members of the national military service, out of anger, frustration and concern of the existing unpleasant situation and deplorable living conditions in Eritrea, may initiate public revolt and remove the PFDJ leadership by force from its position and a prominent young and dynamic leader emerges from the public uprising.

If a political power vacuum is created in Eritrea, is there any opportunity that a potential political leadership would emerge from the Eritrean political opposition groups? It is commonly observed reality that the political opposition groups currently are not in a strong mode of unity. They are too many in numbers and highly divided perhaps in their political manifestation, programs and practices. It is doubtful to expect that the opposition groups in their current situation would be capable to provide a political leadership to take over the leadership position of the country after the departure of the current PFDJ leadership. The prevailing objective realities in Eritrea are the common concerns of all opposition groups. There are many national issues that could allow them to come together and work together in unity. However, for some unknown reasons, or due to some personal disagreements among their leaders, they have not yet brought themselves to work together in unity. It is evident that there are some very prominent and outstanding young Eritreans who have the potential to lead a consolidated and well-coordinated movement at intercontinental level by representing the various political opposition groups in Diasporas. It is quite clear that the Eritrean political opposition groups cannot remove the PFDJ leadership from its political position by a remote control or by political slogans in demonstrations and conferences. The senior leaders of the opposition groups must take the initiative to be the good examples in transferring their political leadership to our young generations. We must be practical to move forward from saying 'enough is enough' to putting ourselves to actions so that we can make a significant and meaningful differences in our people's movement. The various political opposition groups and the Yiakil youth movement working together in unity with all Eritrean professional associations, Eritrean communities and religious institutions, have the capability and responsibility to support morally and financially the progressive elements of the people's movement inside Eritrea to initiate public revolt against the PFDJ regime just like what has happened recently in Sudan and other countries. The more we are thrown into unnecessary disputes and conflicts with each other in Diasporas, the less able we are to unite and work together in support of the Yiakil youth movement in Diasporas and the Fenkil youth movement inside Eritrea which are both determined to transfer the political power to the Eritrean people. There will be no end to the troubles of the people until the political power comes into the hands of the Eritrean people. We need to establish a powerful coalition of all these movements to prepare one powerful and strong political leadership that represents all Eritreans in Diasporas and that would be the only way we can give hope and courage to the Eritrean people at home and in Diasporas.

In this volatile world many unexpected events and circumstances happen due to various cause and effect relationships among people in any country. Mummer Gadhafi, Saddam Hussein,

Siyad Barre, Omar Al Bashir, Hussam Mubarak, Robert Mugabe, and many others, despite the kind of political power they had accumulated around them in their respective countries over their golden years, they have never expected that they would be removed from their political thrones with ignominy and dishonor. It is highly possible that the current political leader in Eritrea may face the same fate as the above mentioned notorious disposed political leaders. It is evident that a political event in any country does not usually happen the way we want it to happen because it has its own dynamism and unique characteristics. To this effect, there is a potential that a political power vacuum may create a sudden serious problem in Eritrea, if we do not properly prepare the necessary political infrastructure and institutional formation to take over the political leadership. Beside the potential uprisings of political public unrest, chaos and disorder, we need to understand that there are powerful external forces that can manipulate the unstable situation and threaten the existence of Eritrea. It is possible that the interference and negative intentions of some global and continental entities towards Eritrea can adversely affect the desire for a peaceful transfer of political leadership in Eritrea and the balance of power in the Horn of Africa. One of the potential external forces that could affect the stability of Eritrea is Ethiopia. **The government of Ethiopia by itself with its insatiable appetite for territorial expansion in the region and its desire for an outlet to the Red Sea, will not be silent in whatever unstable situation happens in Eritrea. If it was not the prevailing unrest and unsettled situation inside Ethiopia, the sovereignty of Eritrea would have been at risk.** Whenever there is peace and harmony inside Ethiopia, the government of Ethiopia will always attempt again and again to invade or interfere in the affairs of Eritrea by taking advantage of any unstable situation in Eritrea. Even though the government of Ethiopia advocates for peace in the region, it has always a hidden agenda in terms of acquiring at least an outlet to the Red Sea at any cost. We must be aware that Ethiopia is still holding a significant size of territory of Eritrea and will not leave our land peacefully without getting something important in return, like the port of Assab. Thus, we must be aware that Ethiopia is watching with curiosity and great interest as to what is going to happen in Eritrea after the downfall of the PFDJ leadership.

If a political power vacuum is created in Eritrea, other hostile elements may also arise to take advantage of the critical time and situation in Eritrea under the pretext of ethnic identity and/or other volatile political slogans which may place the country at great risk by adversely affecting the peaceful transfer of power in Eritrea. For instance, it is possible to have Eritreans living inside Eritrea and abroad that may pop up and show interest in gaining or retaining the political power or influence during the actual transfer of leadership in the name of religion, region or even ethnicity. These Eritreans could be Christians, Moslems, or others who are delusional by the intoxication of religious fanaticism and suffer from outrageous regional and ethnic identity crises. Other sensitive issues like the Afar, Kunama and any other ethnic movements, and the so-called Agaziyan misguided politics, may seek at least some kind of political recognition and attention in the political drama which all of them may have the potential to create political instability in the country. **The ugly politics of polarization of Eritreans in Diasporas by religion, region and ethnicity should not be tolerated and ignored for it could soon propel to reach detrimental circumstances.** Under any situation any political movements must be handled with care, decency and understand because they may have the potential to create chaos and disorder in the country, if the transfer of political power is not in favor of their political interest. The fall out of this political drama surrounded by all these potential and hostile threats and uncertainties, the sovereignty and independence of the country could be in danger and the mere existence and survival of Eritrea as a country could be compromised. We must always remember that we can only survive and sustain, if we are united together as Eritreans.

The future of Eritrea after the departure of the current PFDJ leadership has become a mystery and most Eritreans are worried to death about it as if the current PFDJ leader is irreplaceable. We need to understand that there is nobody who is indispensable including the PFDJ leadership because there are always competent and capable young Eritreans around us to take over the political leadership in Eritrea with the support of the people and lead the nation with great respect and dignity. The removal of the PFDJ leadership is a major undertaking. It is one step forward, but Eritrea has still to face many challenges. Finding the right leadership at the right time is one of the challenges we all need to be concerned now. Whatever is destined to happen to Eritrea is going to happen any time. Whatever is going to happen to Eritrea after the departure of the current political leadership is fundamentally the concern of every Eritrean alive. It is not a situation that we can ignore as less important, or simply expect that nothing traumatic is going to happen to Eritrea. The popular adage says, *"Hope for the best and prepare for the worst."* So, what are we hoping to happen to Eritrea? **We must be organized in our own Eritrean communities and religious institutions and actively participate in our Eritrean people's movement without any hesitation and reservation.** We need to be thoroughly prepared and have the right perspective and positive attitude in believing and hoping that nothing ridiculous or dangerous will happen to Eritrea in the process of transferring the political power once the current PFDJ leader voluntarily or involuntarily leaves the political position. As Confucius said, "In all things, success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure." As Olympic runner, Jackie Joyner-Kersey also said, "It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret." In other words, by failing to prepare ourselves at the very beginning, we are preparing to fail at the very end. It was not raining when Noah built the ark. He built the ark before the arrival of the storm. Thus, we must be prepared to endure and resist if any undesirable situation arises during the transfer of political power which can happen at any time. We cannot pretend to believe that the transfer of political power in Eritrea will be problem-free. We must be practical and understand that there is no perfect time for the peaceful transfer of political power to happen in Eritrea. Obviously, there will be serious challenges, if most Eritreans are not actively involved in determining the destiny of the country. **The Eritrean communities and religious institutions should have the moral obligation and national responsibility to play an important role in mobilizing and bringing the people together in unity and work together for the welfare of the Eritrean people. We, Eritrean scholars and professionals, must live up to our consciousness and national obligations, to put our efforts together and seize the front row seats to actively participate in the peaceful transfer of political power.** We need to prepare ourselves on how we can participate, or at least to give moral support to the current Eritrean people's movement in making a relatively smooth and peaceful transfer of political power in Eritrea by identifying and preparing a legitimate leadership that is capable to represent us at national level. Eritreans of all walks of life need to overhaul their existing old habits, norms and attitudes, religious, ethnic and regional hang-ups, and develop a wide range of progressive programs for the transformation of relationships among ourselves. This would bring unity and encourage us to identify the kind of role we should play collectively together in unity to secure and maintain a peaceful transfer of political power and safeguard the sovereignty and independence of our country. We need to remember that collective efforts usually harvest effective outcomes when we sincerely accept our own responsibility for the future destiny of our children. Other than that, the least we can do, in accordance to our respective faith, is to go to our church, mosque, temple, or synagogue pray to the only one God for all to protect and safeguard Eritrea from encountering any more unfortunate circumstances.

It must be the loss of humanity and the lack of basic understanding among ourselves when we fail to realize that the heaviest guilt in life is declining to stand firmly against social injustice,

political corruption and human rights violations. It is always honorable and noble to march with pride along the side of the people for democracy, justice and peace to prevail in our beloved country, Eritrea. **We must avoid blind support to any political function of any human element on the base of religious and regional affiliations or ethnic identity. Wrong is always wrong, no matter who does it.** When the rights of our people are diminished and buried in the playground, the rights of every one of us are threatened and destroyed. It must be clear to PFDJ regime that it might have fooled many of the Eritrean people in the past. It may even fool a few of the Eritrean people all the time, but it cannot fool many of the Eritrean people all the time. At this time, it has reached the moment to fool itself. The time has come that we must all face the objective reality in Eritrea and make the right choice to join the right crowd. It took us a long time to get to where we are now. It should not take us much time to collectively and actively participate in our Eritrean people's movement. **The more we allow ourselves to be silent, or to procrastinate or delay to bring ourselves together in unity and to do our national obligations, the deeper is the pain and suffering of the Eritrean people and the longer will be the PFDJ leadership to stay in power.** It is a blessing from the Almighty God that we have a decent people and a beautiful country. The Eritrean people have suffered for over fifty years under colonial and dictatorial rules. The Eritrean people deserve to observe and celebrate the immediate implementation of a legitimate national constitution, the existence of justice and peace and the rule of law in Eritrea.

God bless Eritrea and its people!

## ሃገርና ኤርትራ

ሃገር ኣላትና ሃገርና ኤርትራ፡

ንሳ እያ ርእሲ ከተማኣ ኣስመራ፡

ንሳ እያ ሃብታም መሬታ ምስ ባሕራ፡

ንሳ እያ ትነብር ኣብ ሓሳረ መከራ፡

ንሳ እያ ጣልያን ኣብ ጉድጓድ ዝቐበራ፡

ንሳ እያ እንግሊዝ ዝሓምሸሻ ምሓውራ፡

ንሳ እያ ንጉስ ሃይለስላሴ ሕቐኣ ዝሰበራ፡

ንሳ እያ መንግስቱ ዝገዝኣ ብጃህራ ፈኸራ፡

ንሳ እያ መለስ ዝገድኣ በጽፋሩ ዝፋሕጠራ፡

ንሳ እያ ኣብይ ኣሕመድ ዝደለየ ክድምራ፡

ንሳ እያ ህግደፍ ቀፊዱ ዝኣሰራ ዝደከራ፡

ንሳ እያ እሳያስ ዝበላ የብልክን ክሳራ፡

ንሳ እያ ዘየስተማቐረት፡እቲጥዑም ናብራ፡

ንሳ እያ ከይፈተወት ደቃ ንደገ ኣባሪራ፡

ንሳ እያ ትቃለስ ከይተሓለለትብሓቦደፊራ፡

ግዜ ወጊሑ እዩ ክትኸውን ነጻ ሓራ፡

ፍትሒ፣ ራህዋ፣ ክመጽእ ኩሉ በብታራ፡

ናብ ሃገርና ክንምለስ ክንነብር ብሓብራ፡፡

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