



Pillaging Somalia: The Dubious DP World- Ethiopia Deal

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Baadida ninbaa kula deydeya, daalna kaa badane

Oon doonahayn inaad heshana, daayin abidkaaye W/T. Qamaan Bulxan

On March 1, 2018, the Dubai-owned DP World and the government of Ethiopia have concluded a dubious [deal](#) with the unrecognized secessionist region of Somaliland. This happened without notice to or approval from either the fledgling Parliament or the Executive branch of the Somali Federal Republic (SFR).

Despite a Faustian pact between an African neighbor and a petrodollar Arab company across the Gulf of Aden, each being awarded 19% and 51% of the ownership of the Berbera Port, respectively, leaving only a trifling 30% for Somaliland, the deal is both illegal, and injurious to the stately interest of Somalia.



The Ethio-DP World deal was signed in a makeshift office in Dubai. No one can have so far explained why and how Ethiopia garnered 19% of the ownership of a prime real estate (Berbera Port) that it neither owns nor invested any capital for the construction and modernization of said Port. The only public explanation thus came from Ismeal Mohamed Hure (Buba), a member of one of the opposition parties in Hargeisa, who in an interview said that DP World gave that 19% share to Ethiopia.

The Ministry of Ports and Marine Transport of SFR issued a press release on March 2, 2018, declaring the dubious deal null and void, and warned that “the so-called agreement is defective and detrimental to the sovereignty of the Somali Federal Republic (SFR) and the unity of the country.” Moreover, the Prime Minister of Somalia, Hassan Khyre, issued a stern repudiation of the deal and pronounced it dead on arrival (DOA).

In response to the SFR position, the acentric DP World CEO, Sultan Ahmed bin-Sulayem, burbled with unstately statements and said that Somaliland is “an independent country” that has the right to enter into bilateral agreements.

Somaliland leaders have gone rogue on this matter and violated an understanding between Villa Somalia and Hargeisa, in that Somaliland will approach international agreements that seek economic development with the consent of the Federal government. As to the Ethio-DP World, their action is part of a web of foreign entities pillaging Somalia's resources.

For some time now, there have been credible anecdotal information that United Arab Emirates (UAE), the government behind DP World, has been sabotaging Somalia. There are credible security sources that affirm the financing of some ISIS operation by the UAE. Also, Ethiopia since 2006 had either invaded Somalia, undermined various transitional governments through its clients in regional governments and in the parliament, or even armed insurgents, including but not limited to Al-Shabab, all these while she is an AMISOM contributing country.

Founded in 2005, DP World is a NASDAQ listed company with over \$15 billion portfolios and employs over 36,300 in 103 countries (DP World Strategic Plan, 2017). Its revenue for 2017 was a whopping \$4.2 billion. One of the pillars of the company's strategy is to conduct business with "courage." Whether the Berbera deal reflects a strategic "courage" or a risky investment, time will tell. The elephant in the house, though, is whether bin-Sulayem, who enjoys enormous confidence of the erratic Crown Prince, Mohammed bin-Zayed Al Nahyam, can change the fate of a five-century-old ambition held by Ethiopia towards the warm waters of Somalia.

Making Ethiopian Imperial Ambitions Possible

For Ethiopia, to reach its imperial goal and sustain a regional status quo where it freely accesses Somali ports for its wellbeing without Somalia's buy-in is a pipe dream, especially when one

looks at the long trajectory of history. The region had been and continues to be one plagued by conflicts.



A prudent Ethiopia would have sought its ambitions through a more stately alternative, i.e., through a collaborative means with the legitimate and internationally sanctioned SFR. Call the Faustian pact between the EPRDF-led government in Addis and DP World nothing but a short-sighted policy in a volatile region.

Dubai venture capital controls both Berbera and Bosasso

In a way, the current Ethiopian government's posturing over Berbera is a complete repudiation of the late Meles Zenawi's initial position towards Somalia's resources. Following a meeting with the late Mohammed H. Ibrahim Igal in 1994, Mr. Zenawi (founder of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) rebuffed any idea of his country taking advantage of Somalia. He underlined the immense contribution Somalia made to the Ethiopian revolution.

In his concluding remarks, he affirmed to all sides that Ethiopia will only collaborate with Somalia, economically and politically, only when Somalia gets its bearing and reestablishes its unified state (Kindh Ethiopia, 1994).

At the moment, we can arguably say that the post-Meles government in Addis' Arat Kilo, controlled by young cadres who lack focus, are confused; they have put into motion a policy to pursue the dreams of ancient imperial Ethiopia - having unbridled access to the sea of Somalia even if it is through a dubious deal.

Taking into consideration the endemic instability and ethnic strife in Ethiopia, the Berbera deal represents an infantile path for EPRDF to take vis-a-vis Somalia – perhaps a reflection of the beginning of the deterioration of a revolutionary regime in the Horn. It is titillating to argue that EPRDF is behaving as an unsophisticated government that has failed to learn lessons about the history of this region.

Western Bias against Muslim Somalis

The Ethio-Somali conflict on resources, in the past on grazing lands but recently on maritime resources owned by Somalis, goes back to the 16th century. It is to be recalled that the wars between Imam Ahmed Ibunu Khazali and Ethiopian Kings (Libna Dhingil, among others) marked the beginning of this regional conflict. Emperor Menelik himself never shied away from his dream of soaking his cold feet into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean by any means necessary.

America's preeminent Political Science scholar, the late Samuel Huntington, traces back the Ethio-Somali mistrust to distant days – back to the 16th century. In “The Clashes of Civilizations,” he situates the conflict between Somalis and Abyssinians in the war between Christianity led by the Portuguese and Islam by Turkish. He brings the import of these distant wars to present-day politics and openly sides with what he calls “friends” of the West, i.e., Ethiopia.

In the conclusion of his controversial treatise, Huntington calls upon Western institutions (World Bank, IMF, USAID) to defend Ethiopia and diminish the profile of Muslim countries. Somalia is one of those disfavored countries.

In 1996, after he published another controversial book titled “Democracy's Third Wave,” Huntington was commissioned by USAID to go and spend time in Addis Ababa to guide and advise the then-nascent revolution of Ethiopia. It was then that lessons on “The Clashes of Civilization,” and how to establish a one-dominant party system were inculcated in the Ethiopian body politic.

As western Political Science has been shaped by the thoughts of Huntington and his predecessor, George F. Kannon, contemporary Africanist perpetuate the “inalienable” need of Ethiopia to have access to the sea; they advanced a narrative that is biased against Somalia, indeed overplaying the concept of Ethiopian being a Christian nation in a Sea of Muslims.

Lately, nuanced narratives about Ethiopia's rising military and economic power and how that takes primacy over the territorial integrity and sovereign state interests of Somalia dominate Western media. Which is what a recent article, “*Ethiopia, Berbera Port and the Shifting Balance of power in the Horn of Africa*,” carried by a Western publication called *Rising Powers Quarterly*, argued. It stated that Ethiopia as a regional power should impose its “superiority” on its neighbors, i.e., Somalia.

One is tempted to ask, why Somalia, and not Eritria? Didn't Ethiopia historically claim Masawa and Assab - two ports that are close to the heartland of traditional Ethiopia? Of course, the obvious answer lies in the weak government in Mogadishu.

To wit, what does Ethiopian economic growth as the largest market in the region got to do with the sovereign rights of Somalia to be the sole guardian of its own country? In a reversed argument, would any western social scientist see it reasonable for Russia to take over the ports of Finland or Ukraine, because Russia is more populous and has a larger economic market than either Finland or Ukraine? And most of these countries historically were part of Greater Russia

Such a rationalization of the unequal relationship between the Western-favored (a euphemism for Christian cultures) i.e., Ethiopia and Muslim Somalia emanates from an established Western epistemology or school of thought that had historically put the interest of big and powerful nations ahead of small entities. Embedded in this epistemology is that Western/Christian communities are civilized, bigger, powerful, and thus have superior existential interests as opposed to weaker and younger states. Ethiopia for centuries exploited this narrative to its hegemonic interests in the region.

The same theory that served as the basis for the Western world to colonize Africa is now being employed as a reasonable and nuanced social science theory to pillaging Somalia's resources. Simply put, we are witnessing the reincarnation, perhaps more fittingly recycling, of colonial theories applied to the Berbera Port by Western scholars who see the pillaging of Somalia as a normal economic transaction. But it is not!

Whereas the East Indian Company buttressed by mighty Great Britain marked the beginning of the colonization of Somalia in the 19th century, the Ethio-DP World pact pushed by the government of Dubai highlights the pillaging of post-civil war Somalia in the 21st century. The dubious deal that came out of the Ethio-Dubai pact over the Port of Berbera could, in the long run, destabilize the region and reinforce radical movements in the Somali inhabited regions of the Horn of Africa.

Denying History is Fool's Errand

Despite weak government in Mogadishu, Somalia is not dead yet. As a matter of fact, in the last few years, it has been resurrecting. Its international standing as a fragile but independent state is unscathed; the Somalis have proven time and again to be resilient and have tremendous capacity to bounce back.

History bears witness that Ethiopia will never completely defeat Somalia, despite its large populations and Western help. Knowing that Somali nationalism is infectious, organic and transcendental, and can come back roaring in the foreseeable future, the Ethio-DP World deal is counter institutive and therefore an imprudent policy with a significant risk to all involved.

About 120 years ago, upon his arrival at Berbera Port, Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan could not stomach the thought of a British coast guard inspecting him in his own God-given land. Historians believe that impious encounter angered the Sayyid and consequently triggered the longest and most devastating Anglo-African war in the continent.

Similarly, the partition of the Somali territory in the 1940s, where Ethiopia snatch a lion's share owing to its Christian affinity with Britain, resulted in the most enduring political movement in the continent – the Somali Youth League (SYL), which united all Somali speaking population in the continent. That unity in the 1940s through the 1970s also threatened the very existence of Ethiopia. In most recent history, Somalis waged an impacting war against Ethiopia and almost caused the breakup of the ancient empire.

Equally, Ethiopia has played its own game against Somalia by arming clan movements to the detriment of the first republic of Somalia. In short, both states have been and still are in a mutual destructive race.

Despite Western literature shoving a “powerful” and “superior” Ethiopia through our throats, the reality is that Ethiopia as a country is much more venerable than meets the eye.

As seen by recent ethnic conflicts threatening the very existence of the empire, that empire which Menelik created through a brute force often involving scourge-earth invasions of non-Abyssinians, often with Western military support, Ethiopia is fragile and cannot handle sustained conflict with Somalis.

For the unsuspecting eye, a cohesive Ethiopian state has yet to be consolidated. The assorted ethnic groups in the south have not completely been “Ethiopianized.” There is an inherent fragility in Ethiopia, and because of this, it should not perpetuate conflict in the region, which it is currently doing.

Tools to Sabotage Somalia

To get to its objective of having access to the sea, Ethiopia is employing several soft power tools boxes. Three of these tools include the following: First, Ethiopia has been perpetuating the current weak, or in the eyes of Ethiopia, “stateless status quo” of Somalia. The official policy of “Addis Ababa rests on maintaining the status quo in post-civil war Somalia.” Central to this status quo has been and still is for Addis Ababa to have an illegal direct relationship with Hargeisa and other regional governments to often use them as tools to sabotage the efforts of the people of Somalia to resuscitate their state.

The second tool is the use of Somali politicians to ensure that their own country is kept at bay. Bribe and huge sums of money in the form of gift or purported commission payoffs, as is the case with the stipends paid to some known former politicians, are used. May present and former politicians are used by Dubai and DP World as a lobbyist for all things Somalia. They are determined to keep their own country at bay for play for pay.

The third tool in pillaging Somalia for Ethiopia's wellbeing is Dubai's search for a new source for huge surplus-producing investment. Given its deep pocket an investment portfolio of about \$15 billion and the near-absent regulatory mechanism in place, Somalia fits the bill.

On its part, Hargeisa has abused the appeasement policy by which Villa Somalia had thus far conducted business. There was a mutual understating between Hargeisa and Villa Somalia that economic development would be encouraged and the Somali Federal Republic would facilitate that effort to the extent possible. Both the deals on Bosasso and Berbera Ports with DP World

were consummated in that spirit. It was in that light that President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud sanctioned economic development projects within the constraints of the Federal system.

Such an approach to the delicate political question of Somaliland was a larger part of an appeasement policy Villa Somalia chose to pursue, which Hargeisa abused. The climax of such an abuse is reflected in the “defective” deal that is “detrimental to the sovereignty of the Somali Federal Republic and the unity of the Country.”

Concluding Remarks

As Pax American was eclipsed and then died on the heels of the abuse of the rights of nations in South and Latin America, not to mention the 1 million Philippines massacred in America’s attempt to colonize that Asiatic culture in the 1920s, so did Pax Ethiopiana perish over the senseless invasion of Mogadishu in 2006, for the stated objective to “protect” and “enhance” the former’s security. Since then, the good will between the two peoples has been declining.

Between 2006 and 2007, Ethiopian troops killed thousands of Somalis in Mogadishu. In the end, Ethiopia was defeated by a resolute populous revolt called Muqawamo, or the opposition. Consequently, the Ethio-Somali relationship that could have advanced both Pax Ethiopiana and the rebirth of a peaceful and friendlier Somalia was permanently retarded.

Ethiopia must deal with the SFR in a collaborative manner that respects international law as well as the binding IGAD treaty – respecting the territorial integrity of member states. Also, EPRDF needs to go back to the original intent of the late Meles Zenawi – dealing with Somalia on an equal footing. Somalia is ports- rich while Ethiopia is population rich. Ethiopia, whose economy is expanding needs to work with the legitimate government of Somalia so that we can change the tough terrain of history that we have been travelling for centuries.

Moreover, the 7.5 million Somalis in the DDS, whose political power is increasing, should rather be used as a potential conduit to better relations between Ethiopia and Somalia. Kenya has done well in that regard, and Ethiopia should discard its imperial posturing and work with its neighbor with an African spirit that marks a complete departure from what Western “experts” have been advising her.

In the interest of future relations between the two countries, Ethiopia must reverse its course and pursue a policy of mutual coexistence and collaboration with Somalia. An enlightened and far-sighted Ethiopia has a lot more to gain by playing its cards visa-a-vis Somalia right.

A policy of mutual respect, economic cooperation and security collaboration with the Somali Federal Republic could give both Ethiopia and Somalia a long-term stability they both so desperately need.

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