

## EL-BUR TOWN, A BASE STATION FOR JIHAD



El-Bur Town

After the fall of Siyad Barre and the subsequent civil war, Ethiopia has evaluated the risks and the rewards of invading Somalia (it always had the itch) and the possibility of plundering the unprotected resources. On March 2014, it had invaded El Bur (a town in central Somalia) serving the so-called the global 'War on Terror' which has given them unrestricted access and an authorization to kill under the guise of terrorism. The BBC Somali service was quick to air: "Al-Shabab forces lose Somali base of El-Bur" The Somali government and the AMISOM officials were in

triumphant mode at the time, predicting a wider success in defeating Al-Shabab. Ethiopia knows Al-Shabab. In fact, Miles Zinawi, the deceased former prime minister of Ethiopia, has admitted that he had underrated the dedication and capability of the Mujahidin referring to Al-Shabab-Ethiopia war which lasted for about three years. Therefore, their arrival at El Bur was simply a challenge from a familiar foe, but the inconvenience lied in relocating particularly the sisters, the elderly, and the children.

Having seen similar events, the unfolding situation was not a major shock for the residents of El-Bur who emptied the town; they migrated to places that did not necessarily guaranteed them the basic needs but it provided a sanctuary for their faith. They settled villages that are located within the traditional territories of their respective tribes. El-Lahelay became a populous settlement for the new arrivals stretching far and beyond; the new housing accommodations and old simple dwellings gave the town a colorful look. Life was slowly progressing in El-Lahelay, despite being a small village, it played a considerable role in providing the residents with excitement, schools etc. but it could not assume or compensate the longing for El-Bur.

Though inspiration was religious conservation but their sense of vigilance and the agility were lessons acquired from the devastating tribal conflicts, giving them the rapidity to reposition in a safe place. The tribal clashes are part of nomadic life and like volcano, it can erupt at any time which could possibly turn into a full-blown war. It can be triggered by an argument over water well or over pasture, and despite that, the locals maintain a regular life style. Death does not terrify them. In fact, they pursued it when a fellow tribesman is maltreated, and strangely, the same tribal convention that encourages a bloodshed over petty matters also gracefully mandates a reconciliation. Due to last year's tribal leaders' accord, the grudges of the past slayings had been forgotten and peace has prevailed enough for the warriors to lay their weapons down till the next flare ignites.

Sharia law has demolished the tribal caste system by replacing it with equality, and consequently, the tribal wrangles were healed with Quranic verses. The violence had waned and sense of brotherhood had swept throughout the communities that was once the subject of endless raids. In Islam, self-defense is justifiably permissible assuming all preconditions are met but concept is to relay all grievances back to the Sharia court to avoid an impulsive vengeance that only serves subjective urges. The transition was sudden and simple, and the plan is not to disturb the traditional tribal life but simply to weed out the concepts that are not necessarily in line with Islam. Having grasped the spirit of Sharia law, they vowed to study it, to defend it, and what

was simply an attempt to thwart unnecessary aggression has changed into a base station for Jihad. They had profoundly understood Al-Wala' Wa'l Bara' with sureness, *"O you who believe, do not take Jews and the Christians for friends (Awliya). They are Awliya to each other. And the one among you that turns to them is one of them. Indeed, Allah guide not unjust people."* [5:51].

The Ethiopians had settled in deep bunkers walled with sandbags at the center and around the town guarding themselves against incoming attack, and during their stay at El-Bur, there were a plenty of that. The town was utterly empty except a whistling wind that surrounded the untenanted houses. Though the Ethiopians were fearful about the local people, and yet, they were in need of them compelling them to retreat.

On Apr 3, 2017, the Ethiopian troops withdrew empty-handedly from El Bur heading towards Gura'el, *"Today, Ethiopian forces have moved out of their fixed bases in El Bur, and then Al-Shabab has reoccupied the town smoothly, without battle,"* said El-Bur's former mayor Gutale. The West's vision of democracy did not materialize, at least in El-Bur; not that the people of El-Bur oppose healthy developments but all reforms must be within the context of their culture and religion, not by means of military might.

There were cheers and jubilation as the news was propagated; the rattle of the gun fire filled the air, the singing, and the villagers had risen in delight to commemorate the return of a lost town. The scene was echoed by a joy, freedom, and defiance to oppression. By the Grace of Allah (SWT), the love for the black banner was no hidden or small among the Ansaris as we walked around the town. Ansaris are known for their heroism, hospitality, and generosity to their fellow Mujahidin, and truly, they are the flag bearers of the Ummah.

It was a ghost town. Almost, all the houses were in need of maintenance, litters and short thorny trees had congested very much all the pathways. And appallingly, the mattress, bedsheets, and almost all kitchen items were missing from every household presumably looted by the Ethiopians. The remnants of their presence were all over the place; liquor bottles, crumbled makeshift shelters, and the empty cans were scattered by the bunkers clearly indicating the daunting task that the locals were facing in cleaning the town.

I have recently revisited El-Bur, and upon arrival, I have instantly lost the ghost of the unpleasant past. The town is colorful, the structural design hardly resembles that of 2017, and nothing remained the same except the black banner. The local economy was bit in decline due to the drought but at the market, the supply and the demand

were reasonably in equilibrium state. The main bazaar is packed with mini shops that displayed multicolored garments for sale, women with draping Hijab strolled appraising the goods before the final transaction. The hawkers were lauding their goods with attractive phrases hoping for a deal, the money changers sat still under the shade calling the passers, and the donkey-carts loaded with goods shared the streets with the shoppers who were moving in all direction. There was constant echo of 'peace and pleasing of Allah be upon you' beneath the market's resonating noise and people's movements suggested no hurriedness. Even though you have visited the market many times but it has that captivating curiosity that press you to walk around, inquiring a familiar substance with no intention of buying it.

I wondered their source of their endurance, their sense of equanimity which gave them a clear direction, and their resoluteness that is not easily swayed by the life's oscillating surprise concealments. At coffee shop, the dominant topics were about the drought, a hope for a rainfall, death of the animals due to lack of pasture, and surprisingly, the Ethiopian invasion was never mentioned, not even traces of emotions that signaled the event. At the mosque, men in different tribal genealogy are converging for a congregational prayer who so recently bent for vengeance, stood shoulder by shoulder in a single row behind an Imam in tranquil, finding a unity under the shade of Sharia.

The goal of the Islamic faith is to take the humanity to a higher spiritual existence through guidelines that are in accord with intellectual and biological design, and not meeting its standards nor restraining the worldly desires like greed, lust etc. with piety, it plunges the perpetrators to the lowest of the low. Similarly, reviving it dangerously needs lifeblood. The longing for Muslim-wide fraternity under the black banner has been growing, and in Somalia, it is glowing. The perpetrators who conduct war against Allah (SWT), the Prophet (PBUH), and the believers encounter terrible corollaries, "*...And they wanted to harm him [Prophet Abraham [PBUH]], we have made them the worst losers.*" [21:70] And, the Ethiopians fled El-Bur fuming with rage.

Abu Maryam

