

Twenty Years of Independence Series –No. 3
Eritrea: First Two Decades of True Independence
Ghidewon Abay-Asmerom
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On May 24, 2011 Eritrea is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its victory over Ethiopian colonial forces. It had suffered in the hands of three equally evil forces of occupation in hundred years (January 1, 1890--May 24, 1991). The Italians, the British and the Ethiopians. Its May 1991 victory is thus the crown of its long-struggle for independence. It didn't come out of the goodwill of foreign powers. It was brought forth by the tenacity and determination of its people. Precious lives were paid for it: Eritrea's best and brightest. Sadly it was also forced to pay another heavy price of equally precious children to defend its sovereign existence, a mere 7 years later (1998-2000), from the very same forces it defeated in 1991. Forces that salivate every time they hear the word Red Sea. Eritrea is also celebrating 20 years of genuine sovereignty. Here also it is paying a heavy diplomatic price for choosing to remain independent of the major powers that are allergic to the idea of seeing nations develop independent of their dictates.

Eritrea might be relatively small, but it is a nation with significance that far outweighs its size. If its unparalleled heroic struggle of 30-year war for independence is still an untold epic of modern history, its bold move to chart an independent path in the past twenty years is equally exemplary. Unlike other former colonies, independent Eritrea was a scenario none of the super powers wanted to imagine; these powers had left no stone unturned to prevent the birth of independent Eritrea. However, Eritrea pulled it off by achieving independence against all odds and by depending on its people and its resources alone. Now these very same forces, forces that didn't want to see an independent Eritrea, are doing everything they can to frustrate the survival of a peaceful, prosperous and genuinely independent Eritrea.

As students of the history of the Horn of Africa would testify, Eritreans were given no time to savor and enjoy their victory. As the recently leaked US cables clearly imply, Washington, in collusion with Ethiopia, had conspired to spin Eritrea into a chaotic orbit a mere three years after Eritrea's independence was internationally recognized in 1993. They had attempted to kill, in a signature Washington style, Eritrea's president in a plane crash in 1996. When that plan failed, Washington encouraged Ethiopia to invade Eritrea. It is a matter of public record what the American Ambassador to Ethiopia at the time was saying and doing; it is also a matter of public record what the current US Ambassador to the UN did. It is also public knowledge how Washington officials were clearly saying "Ethiopia has to come out victorious out of this war with Eritrea." When that plan fell on its face, Washington, again as implied by the cables, has been working and salivating for a coup d'état that would overthrow the independent-minded Eritrean government.

When the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission, in a 2002 final and binding ruling, affirmed Eritrea's sovereignty over the town of Badme, according to a former US Ambassador, the US

State Department “asked ... to reopen the 2002 decision”, saying the ruling “was wrong”. Washington wanted to “award a major piece of disputed territory to Ethiopia” thus propping up its puppet government in Addis Ababa. After all these failed, and was clear that the Boundary Commission was about to give a virtual demarcation of the border in 2007, Washington started fabricating a non-existent “Somalia-Eritrea” link and set out to punish Eritrea. Everybody who knows the history of the region knows the problem in Somalia is not the creation of Eritrea but that of Somalia’s mortal enemy: Ethiopia. This is a day-light secret. Yet in 2009 Eritrea was scapegoated for a failed US policy calculation and unjust and illegal sanctions were imposed on it under a UN Security Council cover. In this sanctions drama Washington is using a fiction editor called the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring group, a group well known for its bold lies and fabrications.

As they say “Politics makes strange bedfellows” and opposition to Eritrea’s aspiration for independence and independent mindedness has seen several pairs of strange bedfellows. Before independence it was Communist Moscow in bed with Capitalist Washington, and Tripoli with Jerusalem. In their desire to kill Eritrean independence both camps were simultaneously supporting the brutal Ethiopian government militarily and diplomatically. The Soviets provided the MiGs, the Israelis the cluster bombs, the Libyans flew the sorties, while Washington and Berlin were trying diplomatic tricks to save Communist Ethiopia. Today history is repeating itself. International terrorists (from Al Qaeda to Al Shabab) are once more in bed with western powers forming yet another pair of strange bedfellows. All of it to frustrate the independent path Eritrea chose for itself. It is worth noting here that as the Ethiopian Prime Minister boasts to overthrow the Eritrean government, he is using terrorist groups trained by Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and the west seems to be giving Ethiopia a nod. As they say, some things never change!

But there is a question that begs asking. What is it that makes mortal enemies: Capitalists and Communists, and International terrorists and their sworn enemies, to work in unison to undermine Eritrea? What is it that this young East African country has done to be in the constant crosshair of both of these seemingly irreconcilable mortal enemies?

Here is how a British historian (not known to be an Eritreophile) put it in Washington’s Wilson Center January of 2010: “Eritrea was seen as a bunker state; *they were less easy to control*. Ethiopia had a more reliable military perhaps. Their policy was more directable and perhaps predictable. Whereas Eritrea from the mid 90s it was clear was seen unpredictable and *couldn't be relied upon to do certain things that Washington might wanted to do.*” (emphasis mine).

Here we have it. Eritrea’s sin is nothing else but that it is “*less easy to control.*” In other words, Eritrea is too independent; it is unwilling to do Washington’s bidding. The Americans and the Soviets were simultaneously opposed to Eritrea’s independence because of this very trait of the Eritrean leadership. They knew that the Eritrean population in general and the EPLF (Eritrea’s People’s Liberation Front) in particular are too independent to toe their line.

The current campaign against Eritrea by Washington and International terrorists also began immediately when they saw the PFDJ (People's Front for Democracy and Justice), the successor of the EPLF, come forth with a clear and an independent vision enshrined in its National Charter of 1994. Those that couldn't swallow Eritrea's miracle of victory yesterday were not willing to sit idle to see Eritrea making another miracle in transforming the "new nation into a country that works." They couldn't stomach seeing a peaceful and prosperous nation emerge that they cannot take credit of helping. Everything is about their ego. Part of it is racist, another aspect of it is hegemonic. In short, they don't want a success story out of Africa. It would throw a monkey's wrench into their plans. At the same time they don't want a government and leadership that is not corruptible; it would not allow them to plunder the country's resources.

While they could control all other nations through their banks, NGOs and aid-groups, this new nation, Eritrea, was unwilling to kneel down for their handouts. It didn't want to be a slave to any foreign donors. It wanted to attain economic self-sufficiency in its own way and with its own sweat. Furthermore, Eritrea's president was not corrupt like those in the neighborhood. He is a leader who doesn't steal and let others steal his people's meager resources. This is also unacceptable to those who want to live off others resources. They rather have leaders that rob and let them pocket billions, like those we are witnessing falling like domino in North Africa.

Eritrea's cardinal sins however were not these but the fact that it dared to demand accountability of the NGOs operating in its territory. Eritrea had a policy unheard of anywhere in the developing world. The norm was for NGOs to demand accountability of the governments they claim to "help" and to render them irrelevant, but not the other way around. Eritrea had reversed this tradition. As early as 1996 it told the NGOs "you want us to be accountable, fine; we want the same out of you." This was a policy they could not swallow. In their opinion, Africans are supposed to be beggars not partners. They openly started mocking Eritreans with the phrase: "beggars with attitude". Thus the decade old campaign against Eritrea didn't come as they would have us believe, because of "Eritrea's violation of human rights or religious rights", but rather because of Eritrea's violation of a sacrosanct NGO rights: non-accountability to developing nations. In other words, Eritrean leaders were targeted because they didn't allow the non accountable NGOs, and powers these NGOs work for, to rape their country. In this aspect Eritrea was seen as a "threat of good example". It was seen "a threat of a good example" on how poor nations can liberate themselves from poverty and dependency by writing "the biggest success story" in Africa. It was seen as "a threat of a good example" because it was becoming "a model for the regeneration" of Africa. And it was also seen as "a threat of a good example" on how nations can survive and thrive without an army of NGOs.

In conclusion for thirty years the major world powers didn't expect or want Eritrea to be independent let alone to achieve it independently; in the past twenty years they have been trying their best so that Eritrea wouldn't pull another independent miracle and surprise the world by building a peaceful, harmonious, prosperous society that is truly independent. To their dismay

Eritrea is doing just that; its record of success in many fronts, no matter what the detractors say, can speak for itself.

It costs to attain independence and even more to remain truly independent. Eritrea is a prime example of this. The dogs have been howling and growling but the long-suffering Camel (Eritrea's national animal) has been graciously marching forward on its independent path.

Congratulations Eritrea for being a model of two decades of dignity and independent development.