



US Hostility, Not Eritrean Rigidity, Responsible For Sour Relations

United States Diplomat and Former Ambassador to Nigeria and South Africa, Princeton Lyman, recently wrote a piece blaming Eritrea for the lack in progress in relations with the United States. By choosing to remain silent about the many, well-documented wrong-doings of the United States (and Ethiopia) in regard to Eritrea and the region, he also tries to absolve them of any responsibility.

The ill-thought policies of US administration officials, that have caused tragic consequences for the region, started during the unnecessary war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998-2000. At that time US officials, who had been invited by both sides to facilitate a peaceful settlement, decided to take sides, convinced as they were that saving the regime of the late Ethiopian Prime Minister at all costs was their number one priority.

When the war ended and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission rendered its "final and binding" boundary ruling, the United States, ostensibly a guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement failed to uphold the ruling and decided to countenance Ethiopia's flagrant violation. US officials went further and attempted to change the ruling, as related by former US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, with a view to shoring up the Ethiopian regime and strengthening the hand of the Prime Minister against "hardliners in his party."

US hostility to Eritrea increased sharply in the middle of the 2000s when it decided to rely on Ethiopia, whom it had branded an "anchor state," in its war against terrorism in the Horn of Africa. It subsequently instigated the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and to "reward" Ethiopia, it intensified its effort against Eritrea, maligning its government, which has an impeccable record in fighting extremism and terrorism, as a "spoiler." Some US officials openly spoke of "punishing" Eritrea and called for "regime change." A series of concrete measures, including economic, diplomatic and media pressures, were undertaken by Washington against Eritrea and the Eritrean Diaspora in the United States.

Finally, in 2009, the US administration orchestrated the imposition of unfair and illegal sanctions on Eritrea in order to muzzle the country and kill any discussions of Ethiopia's continued illegal occupation of Eritrean territory in violation of international law and UN Security Council resolutions. Solid evidence, including numerous Wikileaks documents, belie Ambassador Lyman's claim that it was African countries and not the United States that was responsible for

sanctions.

Despite US hostile policies and actions, Eritrea has regularly sought to engage the United States. Inter-agency talks in the early 2000s floundered when the US made it absolutely clear that it was not going to shoulder its responsibility in regards to the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary ruling. Another attempt in 2006 failed when the then US Assistant Secretary of Africa Affairs decided that the international boundary ruling should be changed and Eritrea isolated and punished. Even after the imposition of sanctions a high-level meeting was held to open a new chapter, but US hostility proved a bridge too far. Subsequently, in December 2011, the United States went as far as making it impossible for the President of Eritrea to address the United Nations Security Council on the issue of sanctions.

The conclusion is fairly obvious; it is US hostility, not Eritrean rigidity that is the cause of sour relations between the two countries. It is also undeniable that US flawed policies have contributed to the deteriorating situation in the Horn of Africa and beyond. The time has come for a thorough review.

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