



Organization of Eritrean-Americans

OEA Spotlight

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U.S. INTERESTS ILL-SERVED BY ITS AFRICA DIPLOMATS A Policy Blunder in the Horn of Africa

Is the United States being served well by its diplomats in charge of African affairs? Looking at what is going on in one part of Africa, the Horn of Africa, the answer is a resounding no. The Horn of Africa team has utterly failed the United States both in fighting terrorism and winning the country indispensable friends. Africa, it seems, is at the bottom of US policymakers' priority list; but in this ever shrinking, post 9/11, world of today, the United States cannot afford to neglect any part of the globe, let alone the Horn of Africa with its proximity to the volatile Middle East.

However, the incompetence shown by Foggy Bottom towards this part of the world is unfortunately not new. During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers pursued a short-sighted policy of basically blind support for Emperor Haile Sellassie in Ethiopian and broader Horn of Africa matters. What was the result of these policies? Ethiopia experienced a violent communist revolution, the likes of which was unprecedented in the Third World. Eritrea's right to self-determination continued to be trampled and its war for independence entered a new phase. And all Somalia had to show for the U.S.'s brief opportunistic alliance in the late 1970s and 1980s was an unprecedented state collapse in the early 1990s.

Today's American policy failure has three components: injustice towards Eritrea, double-standards in Ethiopia and total failure in Somalia. In the case of Eritrea, it is the continued rejection of a potential ally, and obstructing Eritrea's just and legal rights to appease Ethiopia. In the case of Ethiopia, it is the recycling of the old policy toward Emperor Haile Sellassie in Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's context and turning a blind eye to every atrocity Ethiopian regimes commit. In the case of Somalia, it is the creation of conditions of chaos and anarchy that will usher the Bush

Administration's self-fulfilling prophesy of the potential future radicalization of Somalia.

Eritrea: The U.S. Turning Away Allies

Before Osama Bin Laden made the mountains of Afghanistan his permanent abode he was in the Sudan. What was he doing there and who was his target? He was trying to export his terrorism to a one-year old African nation called Eritrea. To its credit this young nation had warned the U.S. and the world of the eminent danger of global terrorism and did all it could in its capacity to fight and expose Bin Laden. Eritrea's clarification call was not listened to because U.S. officials dismissed it saying "our intelligence hasn't reached it!" That was 1994. While U.S. diplomats were sleeping at the buzzer, Bin Laden turned his organization against U.S. interests and attacked its embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). The rest is history. Unfortunately realizing the error of not listening to reliable, credible and knowledgeable

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local intelligence sooner couldn't undo the damage the American public had suffered since 1994.

Eritrea since the earliest days has sought good relations with the U.S. She has been willing for a constructive engagement and alliance with the United States, despite the gross injustices of the past. However, it was turned down. (This can be found from what

the former U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea Robert Houdek relayed to U.S. Army Colonel David Crawford, who wrote a 2005 Master of Strategic Studies Thesis for the U.S. Army War College arguing the U.S. needs to engage with Eritrea.) There was a repeat of this in the years after 9/11, during which Eritrea had eagerly offered tangible assistance to and cooperation with the U.S. Remember, Eritrea was fighting Al-Qaeda and other terrorists seeking to destroy the secular government and multi-religious society of Eritrea before anyone else. Rather than enhancing cooperation and learning from Eritrea's experiences of three decades of guerrilla warfare, the State Department's response was to kick Eritrea out of AGOA (The African Growth and Opportunity Act) and put Eritrea on various religious freedom, human rights and democracy blacklists. As can be gleaned from public records, Eritrea has continued to seek good relations with the U.S., even to the extent of using scarce resources to hire

expensive American consultants to help (unlike the case of Ethiopia's extensive use of lobbyists, Eritrea had very little fungible "development aid" that it could recycle back to hiring lobbyists in Washington like Ethiopia).

Today we are in the bizarre situation where Jendayi Frazer's Bureau of African Affairs is lobbying and threatening to designate Eritrea as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" for an alleged involvement in Somalia. What is it that Eritrea has done to the US national interest to be included in the company of purveyors of nuclear technology? Why is the reconstitution of the Somali state against U.S. interest?

**Previous Issue (Volume II Issue 3)
No Road is too low for the TPLF**

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In any case if Assistant Secretary Frazer makes good on her threat, then we will have the unprecedented situation of branding as terrorist a nation that is itself an active target of Al-Qaeda, has been a “Coalition Partner” to the U.S. and still maintains good relations with U.S. allies like Israel. This is why the proposed designation is bereft of common sense, and proportionality.

The fundamental reason is that U.S. policy on Africa is designed on a lazy approach of focusing resources on the so-called “Anchor States” – defined as Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia. What a reductionist policy, a complex continent of over fifty states and home to hundreds of ethnic groups is to be anchored to five “unrepresentative” countries. Pity particularly the states like Eritrea that may have problems – regardless of their merit or justice– with one of these anchor states. Imagine in this post 9/11 era, when winning the global war on terrorism is a top priority, the U.S. is not interested in multi-ethnic, multi-religious, internal conflict-free nations in the very near periphery of the Middle East that has experience fighting terrorists, for the simple reason that Eritrea is at odds with one of the “Anchor States”, Ethiopia!

Ethiopia: U.S. Comfort with Mirage of the Status Quo

The U.S.’s Cold War strategy for Ethiopia was to bet all of the U.S.’s diplomatic, economic and military capital in the Horn on Emperor Haile Sellassie. The State Department policy today is to do the same (with some window-dressing pushback by Washington here and there) with the minority regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

Reporters from the New York Times and the Washington Post are gradually awakening to the reality that all is not well in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, particularly the Ogaden. There is no question that U.S. intelligence on the region is gathered by many unscrupulous and non-accountable NGOs, and intelligence ‘contractors’ people that are motivated by self-interest no matter what. This intelligence can easily fool officials and diplomats “who do not have first hand knowledge of the regions they work in.” As it relates to the broader Horn, U.S. diplomats in the region are too dependent on the self-serving analysis of the intelligence agents of Ethiopia. American diplomats have chosen to be taken in by Ethiopian duplicity and misleading politeness rather than soberly and carefully analyzing intelligence regarding the Horn of Africa. Ethiopian leaders have much to gain from feeding dubious to outright false information to the U.S. in order to further endear themselves to Washington. As a result the global war on terrorism is suffering as Ethiopia cries wolf over and over and devalues the seriousness of the real war against terrorism.

Former U.S. Assistant secretary of state for African Affairs Herman Cohen (no friend of Eritrea) admitted in June 2006 to PBS that he believes Ethiopia has been “*feeding false intelligence about terrorists being hidden and that sort of thing*” to the U.S. government. Why? Cohen explained “*Because the Ethiopians are deadly afraid of Moslem control and also they have their own Moslem problem among the Oromo ethnic group in Ethiopia. So they want to keep the Islamists out of power, and they will bring the U.S. into it, if they can.*” (PBS June 6, 2006). Even David Shin, a former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, had admitted six years ago that the intelligence on Somalia is based on disinformation. Here are his words: “*I would only note that there is also a lot of disinformation floating around Somalia. It has been a country where disinformation has been a parlor game for many years, and I hope that whatever information does exist on these linkages [between al-Ithad and al-Qaeda] is looked at pretty carefully and we try to ferret out the good from the bad.*” (VOA, January 19, 2001). U.S. Africa Diplomats should know that the

outsourcing of important intelligence work is a dereliction of duty that will have a negative consequence to the real interests of the United States.

To add insult to injury, there is plenty of evidence that Ethiopia in its continued effort to topple the government of Eritrea is actually supporting the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM) in its war on Eritrea. EIJM was formed and trained by Bin Laden in the Sudan. This group is officially listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S, and one of their training videos was found in Afghanistan. Assistant Secretary Frazer should ask herself about the state sponsorship of terror by her intelligence collaborator Ethiopia.

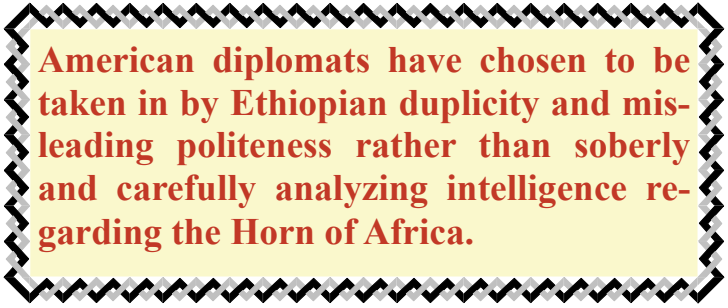
The other failure in United States diplomacy is in Somalia. United States policy in Somalia for the large part is being shaped by Ethiopia’s intelligence. The minority regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia was and is still responsible for the anarchy in Somalia.

Somalia: Creating Chaos and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

The truth is that the current crisis in Somalia is a struggle for the very life of Somalia, the nation and its people. On the one hand were those who had attempted to resuscitate life into the nation and had, with support of the Somali people, managed to bring about peace and order – for the first time in over sixteen years. On the other side are the warlords that were created and supported by Ethiopia, an aggressively belligerent neighbor that doesn’t want to see a united Somalia and was primarily responsible for the chaos that reigned the past decade and half. Add to these a misguided United States foreign policy and the situation has become dangerously explosive. If the U.S.-supported Ethiopian invasion was to prevent the potential for a radicalized Somalia, then it has failed miserably. In fact, the chaos and violence that exists in Somalia today may actually create the conditions for the very radicalization that Dr. Frazer and team feared.

There is another historical dimension to this. In the early 1990s the United States was fighting against the warlords (or at least some of them); now it is fighting to install some of the very same type of warlords whose actions led to the death of American soldiers in the 1990s. None of these warlords has been brought to justice. Such is the tragedy of policymakers who do not want to see beyond their noses and want to fight the battle of today only.

It is time for U.S. diplomats to really serve American interests rather than simply following what is familiar, convenient or “just the way things are done”. There is too much at risk for America’s long-term interests and for the lives of people who live in the regions for which these diplomats help set U.S. policy.



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