

## **U.S. Policy for the Horn of Africa is Devoid of Fairness and Justice**

The recently-imposed US-led UN sanctions on Eritrea have made it painfully clear that United States policy for the Horn of Africa is devoid of fairness and justice.

In spite of the claim that the sanctions were called for by the African Union (AU), the move was actually spearheaded by the United States government. This hasty decision has perturbed hundreds of thousands of Eritrean Americans who, not only as law-abiding, tax-paying, industrious and devoted US citizens but also as grassroots ambassadors, want to see peace and security returned to this part of Africa; the decision also works against the short- and long-term interest of the United States and is contrary to the principles of justice and fairness, which, should guide U.S. foreign policy.

One of the grounds for the sanctions was the allegation that Eritrea provided support to armed groups undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia. To begin with, Eritrea, a poor country with limited resources, does not have the capacity to provide any material support to the said armed groups. More importantly, no evidence whatsoever was presented to substantiate the claim of support by Eritrea. In fact, that the UN Security Council decided to drop the original charge that triggered the process—the allegation that Eritrea was supplying weapons to the Somalia insurgents—in the final resolution is a stark admission to the groundless nature of the whole effort. The real reason for the sanctions was to punish Eritrea for its refusal to stand behind the current US policy in Somalia.

The U.S. policy in Somalia has been to support the fledgling Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that is not representative of the Somali people, but imposed on them by external forces. Eritrea's position on Somalia has been that for the long-run peace and stability in Somalia itself and the Horn region of Africa, a representative government, established through free negotiations of all sectors of Somalia, is a better approach to solving Somalia's problems. Given the chronic failure of the TFG to become a viable government, Eritrea does have a point. At any rate, Eritrea, as a sovereign state in the Horn of Africa, and quite familiar with the socio-political situation in the region, is entitled to its opinion. Responding with a hasty decision for sanctioning Eritrea, instead of a continuing dialogue is contrary to any standard of fairness and justice expected of U.S. foreign policy.

The second ground for the sanctions is stated as a border conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti. Reference is made to Eritrea's alleged refusal to withdraw its forces to the *status quo ante*, and refusal to engage in a bilateral dialogue or accept mediation or facilitation by third parties. The fact is, Eritrea is not occupying any territory of Djibouti. The Eritrea-Djibouti boundary has been a settled matter on the basis of colonially drawn agreements, specifically the France-Italy Protocols of 1900 and 1901. The border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti emerged all of a sudden in 2008. This was created as a distraction from the major border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which continues to be the root cause of the crisis in the Horn region of Africa. It is to be recalled that a deadly border war erupted between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998 that eventually led to the Algiers' Agreement which obligated Eritrea and Ethiopia to settle their border dispute peacefully by submitting the case to a commission, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) whose decision was stipulated to be *final* and *binding*. When the EEBC rendered its decision in 2002, Eritrea accepted the decision and expressed its readiness to implement it. Ethiopia, on the other hand, refused to abide by the decision in violation of international law and defiance of global opinion, and continues to occupy Eritrea's territory.

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The U.S., the African Union and the United Nations, as guarantors of the Algiers Agreement, have given a deaf ear to calls for implementing the EEBC decision, and refrained from putting any pressure on Ethiopia to abide by the final and binding decision. Instead, the international community, especially the U.S. government, treats Ethiopia with a kid's glove, reluctant to offend a country it perceives as an ally in the war against terrorism. Fairness and justice require that border disputes in the region be examined holistically and not selectively. It is not surprising that Eritrea would be upset by the lack of evenhandedness in the policy of the United States in this region regarding border disputes.

Shortchanging Eritrea in favor of Ethiopia, setting aside all senses of fairness and justice, unfortunately, has been the hall mark of U.S. policy in the Horn region of Africa. In the early 1950s, the U.S. was instrumental in federating Eritrea with Ethiopia justifying, in the words of then Secretary of State, John F. Dulles, that doing so was in "the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin," and making it necessary that Eritrea "be linked with our ally, Ethiopia." This policy pronouncement was implemented in spite of the overwhelming demand by the people of Eritrea for independence. When in 1962, the government of Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated the federal arrangement and reduced Eritrea to a mere province of Ethiopia, in an obvious violation of the Federal Act, not a single voice of dissent was heard from the U.S., the United Nations or other international organizations. During Eritrea's long armed struggle for independence (1961 to 1991), for which thousands of Eritrean lives were sacrificed, it was primarily U.S. military and political support that sustained successive Ethiopian governments. In spite of that though, the people of Eritrea single-handedly and heroically won the war of independence and presented the international community with *fait accompli* independence in 1991. And as already described, when Ethiopia refused to implement the EEBC decision on the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute, in contravention of international law and defiance of global opinion, the U.S. and the other guarantors of the Algiers Peace Agreement have failed to put any pressure on Ethiopia to implement the final and binding decision.

In sum, the imposition of sanctions against Eritrea that include an arms embargo, asset freezes and a travel ban, is not based on facts supporting the claim of Eritrea's support to armed groups in Somalia, nor is it based on a credible border dispute with Djibouti, but as a punishment of Eritrea for not lining up with the current U.S. policy on Somalia and the Horn region of Africa. It is also difficult to escape the fact that the U.S. policy that led to in the UNSC sanctions was and still is lopsided, unreasonably favoring Ethiopia, a country shortsightedly perceived as the only ally in the region in the war against terrorism. That is why everyone who wants to see peace and stability returned to this troubled Horn region of Africa should urge the U.S. government to facilitate the immediate lift of the sanctions against Eritrea, and engage Eritrea in a dialogue instead. Doing so, we believe, would be in the long-run interest of the U.S., and peace and security in the region. Given an evenhanded foreign policy towards the region, it is not difficult to believe that Eritrea, as a victim of terrorism itself, can become a reliable ally in the war against extremism and terrorism.

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