

Will the upcoming UN SEMG's Report be buried in the Killing Fields of the Ogaden...
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Since the establishment of the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) with Matt Bryden in the lead, there have been several calls on the UN Security Council to address the apparent double standards, anti-Eritrea bias, the SEMG's lack of independence and undue US and Ethiopian influence on its work. In light of the fact that the SEMG is due to once again produce its Report on Eritrea and Somalia, readers should be forewarned and be prepared for a report that will undoubtedly seek to advance long sought US and Ethiopia agendas vis-à-vis Eritrea's economic, social and political development.

Past SEMG reports on Eritrea have lacked transparency, consistency, equality, due process and proportionality. The last Report (July 2010) read like a wish list of the minority regime in Ethiopia and echoed its sentiments about the Eritrean Diaspora, the leadership in Eritrea and the Ethiopian opposition. The SEMG's detailed discussion on the Ogaden National Liberation front (ONLF) only served to portray how much it had been influenced by the banditry at Menelik Palace. It also served as the basis for another round of US-Ethiopia engineered sanctions, albeit a watered down version of the original draft introduced by Gabon-to give it the US-initiative an "African face".

The US-Ethiopia engineered sanctions against the State of Eritrea using the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been addressed in earlier writings, suffice it to mention a few cables that illustrate US and Ethiopia abuse of IGAD, the regional organization, and how it was used as a tool to advance US agendas in the Horn of Africa, and Eritrea in particular.

A 20 November 2009 cable^[1] detailing a meeting held by US officials serving in East Africa is very clear about IGAD's role in advancing Western interests in the region. This is what the cable stated:

"...IGAD has done some good work, particularly the Sudan peace deal. IGAD allows the international community to put an "African face" on efforts to confront issues in the East Africa region. Working under the IGAD banner offers regional legitimacy to international programs. However, IGAD must be partnered or contracted with other legitimate organizations in order to assure that the work is properly done..."

At no other time has the world and Africans in particular witnessed the total and embarrassing emasculation of Africa's leadership as on 5 December 2011 when leaders from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda were summoned by Susan E. Rice to testify in front of the UN Security Council via satellite link from Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital. They were summoned to give the needed "African face" to a US effort against the State of Eritrea.

What Africans witnessed on that fateful day was not a "diplomatic" engagement; it was in fact a sad display of the total and unadulterated emasculation of their leaders. This author is hard pressed to point to a single instance where European leaders had ever done what these leaders did to one of their own. Never in a million years will we see European and American leaders huddling together in front of Africans to call for the destruction of another state in their union. It was not a show of force, or unity, but rather a show of moral weakness. These leaders were so easily manipulated by Meles Zenawi and his handlers to come and bow down in front of the Security Council in order to advance illicit agendas against the State of Eritrea and its people. It was a sad scene to see one leader after another looking for Meles's approval, after they finished reading what sounded like a script authored by Ethiopia.

Matt Bryden and SEMG Anti-Eritrea Bias

As someone who has loitered in the Horn region for quite a while, Bryden knows who the culprits are, and yet, he insists on pointing fingers at Eritrea. In 1999, he wrote an article on Somalia and this is what he said at the very beginning of that piece:

"...Somalis may be forgiven if they have become wary of foreign help in putting their shattered country back together. Since the absurd colonial dismemberment of the Somali nation between five sovereign states, external involvement in Somalia has ranged from the mediocre to the disastrous. The anemic preparations by the British and Italian governments for Somali independence and statehood, the enthusiastic support of both cold war blocs in the training and armament of the small country's security services and armed forces, and the United Nation's ruinous attempts at nation-building are notable benchmarks in a long history of foreign meddlers - some of them sinister, some benign, others simply incompetent - but all of them ultimately unsuccessful..."

Bryden knows that Eritrea has been consistently calling for non-intervention in Somalia for the last 20 years, yet he blames Eritrea for destabilizing Somalia.

Bryden also knew about Ethiopia's track record in Somalia and he wrote in 1999:

"...It is thus somewhat surprising that new hope for a lasting settlement of the Somali crisis should come from the outside - all the more so that it should emerge from an unexceptional diplomatic body endowed with the cumbersome label 'Committee on Somalia of the IGAD Partners Forum'...That this Committee comprises representatives of so many interlopers from Somalia's unhappy past - among them Italy, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the United Nations - only compounds the novelty of the moment. The inspiration for the breakthrough is to be found in a position paper drafted in late 1998 by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - an institution with a decidedly uneven track record in matters Somali..."

Yet today, Bryden accepts as fact, absurd fabrications and unsubstantiated allegation concocted by the very same Ethiopian regime with the "uneven track record". Go figure!

Ever since the SEMG released its politically motivated and biased, incoherent 417- page July 2010 Report, Eritrea has been calling on the UN Security Council to revamp the SEMG and its mandate. The Report seemed to be parroting Ethiopia's decade long wish list. Despite Eritrea's compliance with Resolution 1907, the SEMG seemed to be working in tandem with Susan E. Rice to find ways to bring further sanctions against Eritrea, once again, based on hearsays and innuendos presented by the minority regime in Ethiopia and its handlers.

The Eritrean Foreign Ministry in its 19 December 2011 letter to the Security Council called on the UNSC to:

"...revamp the mandate, constitution and composition, and working methods of the Monitoring Group to ensure that its individual members operate within the bounds of legality, impartiality, objectivity and professional integrity..."

In the letter, Eritrea's Foreign Minister urged the UN Security Council to:

"...establish an independent, impartial and credible body in place of the Monitoring Group which has failed to garner the support of many members of the Security Council due to its lack of independence, professionalism, impartiality and objectivity as well as its susceptibility to political influences; and...to review and annul the unwarranted measures and resolutions that are rooted on fabricated and groundless accusations with no basis on law and fact and that essentially emanate from misguided and hostile political objectives..."

Eritrea is not the only party that has been calling for Bryden's removal.

When Matt Bryden was appointed to lead the SEMG, the UN Envoy for Somalia protested, but as this Wikileaks cable shows, the US was able to convince the TFG to accept Bryden:

"...Somalia UN Mission Charge Idd Mohamed has raised his opposition to the appointment of Matt Bryden as chair of the Monitoring Group for the UNSC Somalia Sanctions Committee multiple times, including by Press Release. U.S. Special Envoy Yates previously spoke with the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Hussein to discuss their concerns. PM Hussein indicated that Mohamed was not/not acting under orders of the TFG and any communications protesting against Bryden's appointment, such as the Somali UN Mission's letter to the UNSC Presidency or subsequent Press Release, do not represent the TFG position..."

But there were others who questioned his appointment. Here are some of the comments made by concerned Somalis:

§ **"..Mr. Matt Bryden's surprise appointment as a Co-coordinator of the UN Security Council's Monitoring Group is a slap on the face to the Somali nation. At a time when the international community is trying their best to reconcile the opposing faction in Somalia, appointing an individual who is loathed for his advocacy and relentless lobbying to dismember the country is, to say the least, disingenuous, misguided and counter-productive...Mr. Bryden is well known among the Somalis and the NGOs types in Nairobi as an active advocate and Lobbyist for the recognition of Somaliland as an independent country, separate from the Somali Republic. Along with others he has been lionized by the secessionists as friends whom "Somaliland history will write their names in Gold letters...To the Somali pro-unity camp he is known as the "secessionists' Poster Boy" who constantly and relentlessly initiates or participates in schemes to derail any attempt by the international community to restore peace and order under a united stable Somali government..."-(Said A. Saryan, a Bahrein-based Somali Writer)**

§ **"...The Monitoring Group is an agency that was created for the purpose of reporting information regarding arms embargo violations and related matters. Ever since the appointment of Matt Bryden, the agency evolved more as a tool to disintegrate the unionists while advocating for the secessionist agenda of a minority group than its stated goal. His predisposed political stance is as ever visible in this report as the detectable influence from his in-laws..."**

§ **"...As a former military member who served in the region, speaks Somali, and reportedly holds a Somaliland passport, Bryden is tasked with preparing the report in conjunction with a maritime, finance and armed group expert. Their efforts are commendable but their methodology deeply questionable... Considering the major impact a UN freeze on travel and finance can have, the kangaroo court tactics, using witnesses...where possible, multiple sources...where possible and "continuously factoring in the expertise and judgment of... relevant experts" of the group to render judgment... The reader must wade through what sometimes reads like an anonymous scandal and gossip sheet due to the group's reliance on diaspora who have fled a subject region, using anonymous sources or bizarre letters from non-existent authorities ..."**-(Robert Young Pelton, a regional analyst)

This author does not believe that the opposition to Bryden's appointment stemmed from his personality; rather it was his political agendas in the region and his established biases against a unified Somalia. His attitude towards Eritrea's independent leadership has a lot to do with Ethiopia and his prolonged engagement with the minority regime there. In a conversation held with the author in Oslo, Norway, he also indicated that there was no evidence to support the allegations against Eritrea and said that Al Shabbab "did not need Eritrea's money". He also said that the issue at the Security Council was "political". Yet, Bryden decided to pen the anti-Eritrea report to suit his payers...

Bryden's bias against Eritrea is also well documented. During his tenure at the International Crisis Group (ICG), his partiality was a matter of public record. Eritrea's principled stand of non interference in the internal affairs of Somalia and Somalia's re-liberation and reconstitution was in sharp contrast to Bryden's agenda for Somalia and Somaliland. This excerpt from a report posted by Afrol1 in November 2010 shows that Matt Bryden had already made his conclusions about Eritrea, long before he authored the July 2010 SEMG Report accusing Eritrea of destabilizing Ethiopia:

"...Matt Bryden, a consultant at the International Crisis Group (ICG), recently told afrol News that the Eritrean offensive against Ethiopia goes even further, involving the Ethiopian rebel groups Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). "Eritrean-trained Oromo fighters" are being "hosted" by the Somali Islamists and the ONLF - ethnic Somali rebels in Ethiopia's Ogaden region - is being armed by Eritrea...According to security expert Bryden, Eritrea has a proper interest in fuelling an all-inclusive war in Somalia, which could spread throughout the African Horn region. "Eritrea's strategy appears to be to stretch Ethiopian military capacity by opening a second front in southern Somalia while ramping up the pressure along the Ethio-Eritrean frontier," said Mr. Bryden, adding that Asmara is arming Ethiopian rebel groups..."

Ethiopia relied on Bryden's pre-made conclusions to advance its treachery against Eritrea.

Double Standards

The SEMG has documented huge violations of the Somalia Arms Embargo by Ethiopia and the US and yet, it reserves the most intrusive and devastating recommendations for Eritrea-without providing any independent and verifiable proof of its allegations. The stark contrast between the SEMG's treatment of Eritrea and Ethiopia, with an egregious record in Somalia and the region, is further evidence of the SEMG's political motivations behind its reports. The reports seem to reflect US policy for Eritrea and long held provocative agendas and interests in the region.

The SEMG reports have been consistent with US-Ethiopia agendas in Somalia and the region. Of course, as the dominant power on the Security Council, the US plays a decisive role in the budget of the SEMG and it is also dependent on US and Ethiopian intelligence to compile its reports. The allegations against Eritrea presented by the SEMG in its 2010 report came from Ethiopia and the US Ambassador to the United Nations pretty much admitted to it during her media stake out on 5 December 2010. Here is what Susan E. Rice told Inner City Press when she was asked about the allegations against Eritrea and Russia's concerns regarding the fact that "there wasn't sufficient proof provided of this alleged plot to attack the AU summit in Addis", an allegation made by Ethiopia:

"...With respect to the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group evidence regarding the plot - the thankfully foiled plot - and planned attack on the African Union Summit in January, the evidence provided by the Monitoring Group we know to be very compelling and we have every confidence in its full veracity...The Ethiopian Government enabled every embassy in Addis Ababa that wished to come and view the evidence themselves. Some took the opportunity to do so; others didn't. I don't understand the basis for Russia's claim that the evidence was not available or not compelling. From the United States' point of view, we have every confidence in the veracity of that evidence..."

The SEMG's reports are based on information given to it by its American and Ethiopian interlocutors and its penchant for "naming and shaming" Eritrea while ignoring and downplaying, and at times white washing, Ethiopia's numerous violation of international law, the African and UN Charters, and the Somalia Arms Embargo, are glaringly obvious.

In the past, many have warned about Ethiopia's role in Somalia's destabilization and disintegration, yet Washington, and the SEMG, continues to rely on Ethiopia's self serving farfetched fabrications. When the minority regime felt threatened by forces in Ethiopia, it has labeled them "terrorists", "anti peace elements" etc. and used the UN, AU and IGAD as tools to

eliminate these threats to its stranglehold on the Ethiopian people. Here are a few examples:

§ **"...America's informants on the "terrorist" activities of al-Itihaad are its local enemies, the Rahanwein clan militia of the southwest and their allies, the Ethiopians, who are also America's favoured regional power...They and the Ethiopians are telling the Americans that the new civilian government has "terrorist" links and, it seems, the Americans are willing to listen. It is a classic case of US allies telling Washington that their local enemies are terrorists...Ethiopia has long been Somalia's main rival in the region and its foreign policy is always aimed at keeping Somalia weak and divided...."**-(Richard Dowden 13 December 2001-The Guardian[2])

§ **"...Ethiopia is actively trying to destabilise its ruined neighbour out of a long-standing, partly justified, fear of the effect a united Somalia would have on its own 3m ethnic Somalis. To strike Somalia on Ethiopia's advice would be like invading Pakistan on a tip-off from India...Al-Itihaad appeared on America's hit list because of its alleged responsibility for the assassination attempts in Ethiopia's capital. There are no other terrorism allegations against it and, besides those raised by Ethiopia, no substantial allegations of a link to al-Qaida..."**-(James Astill-The Guardian 3 December 2001[3])

§ **"...The Americans are informed about al-Ittihad by the Ethiopians, their ally in the region. Ethiopia has blamed al-Ittihad for bomb attacks in Addis Ababa and crossed the border into Somalia on several occasions to attack its camps..."**-(Richard Dowden-The Observer, Saturday 30 November 2002[4])

Based on Ethiopia's allegations, the US took action against these entities, shut them down and put them on the US terrorist list. The same modus operandi was used to place Al Shabbab (armed youth wing of the Union of Islamic Courts) on the US and UN lists...

It was also based on "faulty Ethiopian intelligence" that US forces bombed Somalia in 2006, pulverizing farms, villages and killing innocent Somalis. It was Ethiopia's pretext of "hunting down terrorists" that won it US backing during its 2006 invasion and occupation of Somalia in violation of Security Council resolutions 1724, 1725 and 1744. That international crime and violation of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity put Somalia on the brink of disaster and created the greatest humanitarian tragedy that promises to haunt the region for decades. Diverting attention from this criminal adventure, Matt Bryden and the SEMG choose instead to point bloody fingers at Eritrea.

Susceptibility of SEMG to be used as a political tool

The Wikileaks cables show that on one or more occasions, Matt Bryden has used the Monitoring Group to advance political agendas in the region. Here are a few examples:

A cable details a 23 July 2009 meeting with US Ambassador DiCarlo and the Somali Foreign Minister Omaar. According to the cable, Ommar "underscored his commitment to providing the Security Council with evidence on Eritrean involvement in the insurgency". Here is an excerpt from that cable[5]:

"...Ambassador DiCarlo told Foreign Minister Omaar that while Council members do not necessarily wish to close the door on negotiations with Eritrea, the lack of progress has prompted the Council to seriously assess next steps. DiCarlo pointed to the limited number of speakers during a July 22 Security Council lunch on Somalia with Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa as evidence that the SC is still contemplating the direction it will take; additional information on Eritrean actions within Somalia would be useful as the Council determines how best to move forward. Omaar cited the presence of three Eritrean military officers living in Mogadishu, as well as the discovery of Eritrean ammunition in the city, as examples of Eritrean meddling, and said that he is ready to support any request for more information. Omaar suggested that Matt Bryden, the head of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, travel to Mogadishu to witness the evidence first-hand. The meeting concluded with Foreign Minister Omaar noting that he will speak at the Security Council briefing on Somalia Wednesday, July 29..."

Another cable[6] details a conversation with a Somaliland opposition leader who was according to the cable "outraged at President Dahir Riyale's recent rejection of a voter registration list". The cable says that opposition leaders suggested increased diplomatic pressure on Riyale, coupled with concrete threats to curtail his freedom of travel and freeze his personal finances abroad. The US encouraged the opposition to "remain resolute but peaceful". Here is what the cable said-note what Bryden proposes:

"...They recommended we, and especially the Europeans, threaten Riyale and his family with a travel ban and asset freeze. One mechanism could be the UN monitoring group, which could list Riyale and his facilitators as threats to Somali peace and security, they said. (Note: In a separate conversation UN Somalia Monitoring Group coordinator Matt Bryden (protect) confirmed it would be appropriate for the group to consider Riyale's intransigence on elections. End Note)..."

Is that not outside of the Monitoring Group's mandate? Furthermore why did the cables want to protect Bryden's name? Could it be because what Bryden is telling the US official is illegal?

The pretext of stabilizing Somalia does not give Matt Bryden the right to subordinate the sovereign rights of States which are protected under the UN Charter. The SEMG should not be used a tool to give the reckless frightened beleaguered minority regime in Ethiopia and its schizophrenic leaders a political win at Eritrea's expense. It should also not be used to advance US continued racist and incoherent policies for the Horn of Africa and hostile policies towards Eritrea and its people. If Eritrea's concerns and that of the many other parties are not addressed, the SEMG reports will be meaningless and will only further undermine peace, stability and security in the region. The SEMG will once again serve to advance the political agendas of the US and the minority regime in Ethiopia, at the expense of Eritrea's sovereign rights.

The SEMG seems to echo Ethiopia's sentiments and has used Eritrea as a pretext to go after Ethiopian opposition groups in Somalia, especially the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), a group prominently featured in all its reports. Eritrea's political support for the struggling people of Ethiopia should not be exaggerated as the ONLF and other Ethiopian groups get the bulk of their support from the vast Ethiopian Diaspora. It is an open secret and known to all that these groups are courted and supported by various US and European entities and pointing fingers at Eritrea are not only deceptive, but also very hypocritical.

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) was founded in 1984, long before Eritrea became an independent State. It was part of the EPRDF and closely allied with the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Ethiopian peoples struggle against the Menghistu Hailemariam's Derg regime. The abuse, killings, tortures and genocides in the Gambela region has forced the ONLF today is fighting against the minority Ethiopian regime to defend the rights of the people of Ethiopia living in the Ogaden region According to Genocide Watch:

"...The Ethiopian government has initiated a genocidal campaign against the Ogadeni civilian population. The Ethiopian Peoples Defense Forces are using a systematic policy of intimidation, rape, assault and detention and deportation against Ogadeni civilians. Ten of thousands of people have fled to refugee camps in Kenya and Somalia. The Ethiopian Army's counter –insurgency campaign in Ogaden has included numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Ethiopian government's policy in Ogaden is to suppress all demands for autonomy from Ogadenis. It has included gradual starvation of the population in IDP camps – a policy Genocide Watch calls Genocide By Attrition...It has cut off the IDP camps from humanitarian aid, and barred and arrested all journalists who could report on its crimes. Two Swedish journalists are still serving eleven-year sentences in Ethiopian prisons for reporting on the Ogaden massacres..."

Eritrea is not responsible for the many conflicts that are raging in Ethiopia as a result of the frightened minority regime's bigotry and destructive ethnic and religious policies. If the SEMG insists on making the ONLF at the center of its accusations against the State of Eritrea at the behest of the minority regime in Ethiopia, its credibility and integrity will be... to paraphrase Zbigniew Brzezinski...buried in the killing fields of the Ogaden!

The rule of law must prevail over the law of the jungle!

[1] <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09NAIROBI2383.html> accessed 21 May 2012

[2] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,617819,00.html>) accessed 29 June 2012

[3] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/dec/04/afghanistan.jamesastill> accessed 29 June 2012

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/dec/01/alqaida.kenya> accessed 29 June 2012

[5] <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/07/09USUNNEWYORK723.html> accessed 29 June 2012

[6] <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/08/09NAIROBI1685.html> accessed 29 June 2012