

The Soviet Union and its World Influence II

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It was the US which from the start obstructed a just solution of the Eritrean case. The US which found Eritrean self-determination incompatible with the global and regional interests took a hostile stand on the Eritrean struggle and provided the Haile Selassie regime with military, economic and diplomatic support. After the fall of Haile Selassie, the US was unwilling to hastily deliver arms to Ethiopia as it felt threatened by the orientation of the popular uprising. Consequently its role was taken by the Soviet Union. This development which had a major influence on American global and regional interests did not, however, result in a change of the US stance on Eritrea. On the contrary, American economic and diplomatic support for the Dergue grew as the Americans basing themselves on the experience of Soviet relations with the Third World, particularly Middle Eastern countries, Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia-reasoned that Soviet influence in Ethiopia would follow the same course.

To aid this process, the US gave the Dergue economic and diplomatic backing and refrained from raising or supporting the Eritrean case. It also persuaded its friends and allies to take a similar position. Leaving aside the just and legitimate right of the Eritrean people for self-determination, it raised the diversionary issue of the nature of the EPLF, whom it labeled "Marxist".

The EPLF, nonetheless, persistently called on the US as a very influential member of the international community to change its stand and play an active role in bringing a just political solution to the problem. Even though the American administration did not respond positively, the EPLF with some success continued to take its case to the American people and Congress.

Before the federation, the Soviet Union supported the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination. But when the federation was being violated and the Eritrean people repeatedly appealed to the UN, the Soviet Union did not raise its voice in support of justice. On the contrary in an attempt at exploiting Haile Selassie's positive image in Africa, the Soviet Union gradually improved its diplomatic ties with Ethiopia, offered economic aid, built the Assab oil refinery, established the Bahrdar technical school and expanded its trade. It did not offer, any support to the Eritrean revolution or Ethiopian opposition forces, until the overthrow of Haile Selassie. Even when the monarchy crumbled, the Soviets preferred to watch closely the unfolding events and did not take any initiative to support the just struggle of the Eritrean people.