

Civilized but less fortunate people

Conti Rossini, a 19th Italian sociologist who extensively studied the culture, life style, social organization and the traditional laws of the Eritrean society, described the manner of maintaining law and order and the overall culture of the Eritrean people as “a guard without a weapon (Guardia senza armi)”. He expressed his appreciation in this manner when he deeply observed the law-abiding nature of the Eritrean society by examining the various traditional laws that were used for running public affairs in the different Eritrean communities. In pre-colonial Eritrea, no weapons or police were used to enforce laws; there were no security forces responsible for maintaining law and order. Instead the respective customary laws were used for properly managing public resources and for promoting justice within the society. To this effect, outsiders who happen to witness the cumulative wisdom that has been documented in our traditional laws often tend to adore it. Therefore, aggression and violence which largely characterize wildlife are alien in the history of the Eritrean society. As stated earlier, the fact that the Eritrean society is a historically law-abiding society has enabled it to have a civilized culture as obeying law has been part of its deeply rooted identity. The civic awareness that is based on this tradition enables it to prevail against the ones that tend to be preoccupied with the logic of using force. Very unfortunately, this civilized and law-abiding society, which does not claim what does not belong to it and strongly abhors those who tend to exploit others and act violently, has been historically confronted by forces that are characterized by the law of the jungle.

One of the motives of such criminals who recurrently violate the rights of the Eritrean people is their inherent tendencies to have a lion's share of things in their interrelations coupled with the geographic location and the overall resources the country is endowed with. The fact that Eritrea owns the longest coastal lines of the Red Sea, which is the most preferable international commercial line, is one of the reasons why the superpowers tend to use Eritrean sovereignty as part of their intervention in their attempt to control the resources associated with the aforesaid endowment. The most important problem associated with the continuous violation of the rights of the Eritrean people is linked to the US foreign policy towards the Horn of Africa. The reason is that, particularly since the end World War Two, the US has been treating Ethiopia preferentially. The Eritrean Government is not bothered by the fact that the American administrations often treat successive Ethiopian regimes preferentially; however misguided their policies may be, it is up to the US administration to adopt any policy – they can do whatever they choose to do. What the Eritrean Government can never tolerate is what is done by the American Government, that considerably deviates from justice and fairness, at the expense of the rule of law, international law, the sovereignty of Eritrea and the rights of Eritrean citizens as well as what is done as a consequence of the said policy that jeopardizes the life of the peoples and the stability of our region.

The First Chapter of Violation of Law

During the decolonization process in Africa (mid of the last century) when African countries

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were freed from colonial oppressions, the international community led by America unjustly denied Eritrea its right to self-determination. Instead Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia (a country that was far more backward when compared to Eritrea) in the form of federation. John Foster Dulles, who was Secretary of State at that time, unequivocally stated that America was motivated to have Eritrea annexed by Ethiopia simply because the then Ethiopian regime was, like the present one, a servile government in its relationships with the United States.

“From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless the strategic interest of the United States in the Red Sea basin and the considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally Ethiopia,” . . . said John Foster Dulles before 60 years.

The federation that was engineered by America was contrary to the consent of the Eritrean people. The covert objective of this evil measure was to gradually and entirely undermine the independence of Eritrea, that is, to have Eritrea entirely annexed by Ethiopia as an integral part of the imperial regime. Stated differently, the federation was a cover-up – it was not really meant to have an autonomous government in Eritrea. As a consequence, in 1962 when the imperial regime of Ethiopia decided to make Eritrea part of Ethiopia in violation of international law and the terms of the federation that was mediated by the United Nations, the international community led by America turned its back and failed to oppose such a grave violation of law. It is this inaction that made the Eritrean people readily alert to redress their rights in all possible means.

When the rights of the Eritrean people were considerably undermined in this manner, the Eritrean people, that has a civilized culture of settling disputes peacefully and nonviolently, opposed what has happened to the country through peaceful mechanisms so as not to underestimate international law and international principles. However, the officials in America, who are characterized by imperialism and tend to believe in the law of the jungle, aborted what the Eritrean citizens attempted to achieve through peaceful mechanisms. Consequently, the Haileselassie and Derg regimes in Ethiopia did their best to hinder the Eritrean people in their attempt to redress their rights and more importantly these regimes were massively backed by the superpowers (both the United States and the Soviet Union). As a result of such misguided policies, these forces caused untold atrocities and oppressions in Eritrea and the Eritrean people suffered a lot. However, such lawlessness and what the mentioned forces tried to forcibly dictate over the Eritrean people were not able to bury justice and what rightfully belongs to Eritrea forever. The people of Eritrea could successfully undo the injustice and the unreasonable motives of the aforesaid forces through rightful struggle that was entirely based on the unity and internal resources of the people of Eritrea. We Eritreans acted in unison and as a result what we did significantly outweighed what the Ethiopian regimes along with the forces backing them did. Hence, eventually we achieved our independence while we paid considerably precious price for it.

The Cost of the First Chapter Violation of Law

As the result of the bitter struggle aimed at redressing the right to self-determination, the people of Eritrea were forced to pay considerable human lives. In addition to the hundreds of thousands who lost their lives as a result of the atrocities committed by the colonial enemies of

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Eritrea, over 65,000 Eritrean citizens were martyred and over 10,000 citizens became disabled in the course of achieving our independence. And many others suffered untold torture in the prison cells of the Ethiopian colonial regime. Still a large number of Eritreans were forced to immigrate to different parts of the world such as Sudan, the Middle East, Europe and America. Those Eritreans who were under the control of the colonial regime inside Eritrea also suffered a lot.

What has been documented in historical records indicate that over a million Ethiopian soldiers lost their lives and resources that are estimated tens of billions of USD were wasted in the unlawfully desire to annex Eritrea in violation of its right to self-determination. In this case, one has also to take into account the opportunity cost of what was done as a result of the grave violations of rights and laws that were strongly reinforced by the United States of America. When we think in terms of what could have been done in promoting the life of the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia in particular and the peoples of our region at large with the unnecessarily wasted resources, the lost opportunities and resources are incredibly enormous. However, the officials within the American government were not held accountable and were not tried and considered war criminals for the considerably enormous loss of lives caused as a result of their undesirable actions.

The Independence of Eritrea – a bitter pill that is hard to swallow for America

The misguided policies of the US, which were the root causes of all the costs incurred un the course of the struggle has not changed even at a time the Eritrean people freed their country from the yokes of colonialism with a heavy price both in human and material resources. America was trying its best until the eve of the official declaration of Eritrean independence to influence the EPLF to change its mind about the complete independence of Eritrea. At that time the American government used to threaten the EPLF that it would not recognize Eritrea as a sovereign country if the EPLF decided to declare independence. Between 1991 and 1993, the EPLF experienced a publicly unannounced cold and covert war with America. To this degree, the American government tried to use its influence and authority in the United Nations to color and water down the independence of Eritrea. The EPLF, which was not a recognized government at that time, was determined to uncompromisingly achieve independence, that is, without being disheartened and intimidated by the appearance of Goliath. Herman Cohen, who was an Assistant Secretary of State responsible for African affairs at that time, has described what was done by his country in an attempt to shape the Eritrean independence as follows:

“Any decision that is made about Eritrea will have an effect on the future of Ethiopia. Hence, after they arrived in Asmara, we have asked the EPLF to be reasonably objective in relation to this issue. While the Ethiopian army has been defeated in Eritrea, we have reminded the EPLF not to declare their independence. If they are heedless about this concern, we have also informed them that the independence of Eritrea is not going to be recognized in the West.”

The Eritrean people throughout their history have heroically struggled against conspiracies in the military, diplomatic and political arena. Unparalleled heroism was seen during the course of the struggle for Eritrean independence. As a result of the heavy price paid Eritrea and Eritreans were able to have their rightful place in books of history. The fact that the Eritrean

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independence was decided and sealed by a popular referendum that was witnessed by international observers indicates the law-abiding nature of the people of Eritrea. That means the independence of Eritrea was made legitimate 19 years ago in the month of April through popular vote. Therefore, the month of April 1993 is a legal landmark in the history of Eritrea marking not only the law-abiding nature of the people of Eritrea but also the legal closure of a chapter of violation and aggression in the history of the country. At that time, while the Eritrean independence was a bitter pill that was hard to swallow for America and its satellites, as the Eritrean people have a sovereign right to self-determination, those forces that bitterly opposed the Eritrean independence had no option except swallowing the bitter pill.