

## **What is behind Haunting Eritrea ?**

Posted on Thursday, January 28 @ 00:05:00 GMT by [admin](#)

### **By Abdul Nabi Shaheen**

What is now happening in the case of Eritrea , with an international sanction through the UN Security Council Resolution 1907, is simply nothing other than a new form of confrontation (with the African country).

The enemy here is managed to cleverly conceal some treacherous contentment in targeting the victim.

The Western media, especially the US one, plays a vital role in realizing its devilish goal through publishing a series of news stories and reports that aimed at tarnishing the image of Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, as if he was the new Saddam Hussein of Africa .

This sort of confrontation is the byproduct of well-orchestrated plans and a hostile approach to destabilize a country that strives to stand on its own foot, show its independent identity and rid of the Western hegemony.

The hostile decision, taken against Eritrea by the UN body at the behest of the Western powers, brings forth a myriad of questions and doubts into the minds of any political analysts or impartial observers – What are the evidences collected by the UN Security Council in taking such a decision against a country, which is in the hit list of the United States? Was it for the first time the people of Eritrea become target of the conspiracy by the colonial powers? How much is the gravity of such a targeting? What are the immediate and future goals that these forces originally want to realize against the people and government of Eritrea through this type of whipping as part of a pressure tactics to force it to obey them?

I had an exclusive interview with President Isaias Afewerki last year, in which the president unveiled the entire gamut of the Western conspiracy. I still do believe that President Afewerki was fully aware of these types of well-orchestrated machinations against his government and people. I have had the personal feeling that the president has been preoccupied only with the concerns of his country and people. He is a visionary leader striving to achieve all round national development and growth of Eritrea as an independent and sovereign country.

In that interview as well as in similar interviews and briefings for several other news papers, Afewerki drew attention to the fact that his country has been a target of conspiracies of the US intelligence agencies with attempts to undermine the stability of the country, and encourage youths to leave the country for abroad in order to carry out anti-national activities.

The hostility toward this tiny impoverished African country, which is striving to have an influential regional role in this part of the African continent, was behind the Western maneuvers, led by the US , in cooperation with some neighboring African countries. They resort to various types of punitive measures against this country as was in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan earlier.

They are trying to create a similar scenario with allegations that Eritrea is supporting armed Muslim militants of Somalia and giving them shelter. There are

also allegations that Eritrea is extending support to Al Qaeda and the Shiite Al Houthi rebels of Yemen . Interestingly, even Yemen has so far not leveled such a charge against Eritrea with regard to Al Houthi rebels, who have been battling government forces since several months.

While calling for imposing sanctions against Eritrea at the UN Security Council, the US envoy Susan E. Rice noted that her country quietly pressed Eritrea in recent months to cease its support for Somali militants but had made little progress. What she had said at the UN simply reminds us of the similar misleading of the international community by the then UN Secretary of State Collin Powell to justify the unilateral US invasion of Iraq .

Last month, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1907 imposing an arms embargo on Eritrea and travel restrictions and an asset freeze on members of the Eritrean political and military leadership. This resolution was the handiwork of the United States and Uganda , in coordination with Ethiopia , Djibouti and Kenya .

The UN resolution follows a similar action by the African Union earlier. The African Union slammed the government of Afewerki saying: "The acts of Eritrea were instrumental in undermining efforts to establish peace in Somalia . Likewise, Eritrea 's dispute with Djibouti poses threat to peace and security of both the countries." It is noteworthy that President Afewerki has so far not come out defying the UN decision even though it was the outcome of the US conspiracies to destabilize his government and replace with one, who favors them, and that was with the support of Ethiopia .

It is more evident that it is impossible to impose the Western hegemony upon the rest of the world as defiance against it is gaining ground across the globe. There is Venezuela , leading some sort of this 'anti-Western insurgency' in Latin America while Russia is leading the dissent voice in Europe . There are Iran and North Korea in the Asian continent. As for the African continent, the baton is with Sudan and Eritrea . If these countries give in to the Western pressures, that mean that the confrontation would end in their dismal defeat.

There is no doubt that the US is more concentrated now in Yemen and Eritrea . This was on the pretext of a war on Al Qaeda and putting an end to the insurgency by Al Houthi rebels. The US administration is spreading the message not only in the Arab world and Africa but also in other parts of the world that Yemen is a safe haven for Al Qaeda and that Eritrea is engaged in providing training to Al Houthis with the support and supervision of Iran at the camps in Danqalalu, east of Qanda city in central Eritrea, Tabur on Musawwa road and two other places in Shawa region, close to Sudan.

Main charge of US against Afewerki was that he harbors training camps for rebels in its soil. In addition to this, there are also charges that Eritrea is allowing militants to use its sea waters. The United States has unleashed an aggressive media campaign based on lies that it is allowing Iran to use its islands, including Domira located close to Djibouti , for military and intelligence purposes.

Is there any logic to think that Eritrea is allowing to use most of its territories, whose independence and sovereignty was achieved with martyrdom of hundreds of thousands of countrymen, as a colony of Iran ?

It is also ironic that Yemen itself had accused Asmara of using Israeli naval boats during the Eritrea – Yemen military conflict over the strategic Hanish Islands in the Red Sea in December 1995. Yemen contended that Eritrean forces broke a truce and captured Greater Hanish, the main island in a chain between the two nations, sits astride one of the world's major shipping lanes, near Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern entrance to the Red Sea.

As a media person, who covered that war and conducted separate interviews with presidents of Yemen and Eritrea while the fighting was raging, I remember that the Yemeni media and most of the Arab press reported then about the presence of military bases, as well as missile launching pads and military hardware from Israel in those islands. But now, the allegation is that Eritrea is hosting Iranian military personnel at these islands.

Is it possible for Afewerki to collect the magic wand of Mousa to have a gathering of its military together with the Iranian intelligence and its Israeli counterpart in these islands to turn them into islands of wonders similar to those in the Arabian Nights (Alif Laila wa-Laila)?

The overwhelming presence of naval forces of US and other Western countries as well as their intelligence apparatus on the international waters in the Red Sea on the pretext of countering Somali pirates also seems to be detrimental to the interests of Eritrea . They are engaged in monitoring and spying over the Eritrean ports and islands rather than the pirates.

Also, Washington continues to create media outcry about the Iranian military presence at the Port of Assab, located in southern Eritrea along the Red Sea, and the types of Iranian weapons amassed there, saying that these weapons are much larger than what actually needed to protect the oil facilities there.

It is noteworthy that Asmara signed an agreement with Tehran in September 2008 to grant exclusive rights to Tehran to supervise the maintenance and development works of the Assab Refinery of Eritrean Oil Recycling Company at the Assab Port. Under the agreement, Iran is engaged in the reconstruction works of the refinery established earlier by Russia .

Washington and London are in the forefront of taking strict punitive measures against Eritrea over alleged support to militants by making use of their massive media weapon. The US administration recognizes the harsh reality that it is not in a position to enter into a new military conflict aimed at deposing Presidents Afewerki of Eritrea and Omar Al Bashir of Sudan .

Washington no longer wants to be entangled in another quagmire after it has been desperately pursuing an exit from the Iraqi and Afghan swamps. However, there is no doubt that it will, of course, change its tactics and plans to realize its (imperial) goals.

The Americans may resort to similar tactics to bring down governments by using military might as was happened in Iraq and Afghanistan . They would also probably explore other options under the cover of international bodies to get legitimacy for their acts for such punitive actions against those in their hit list, the latest of which was the UN Security Council Resolution 1907 passed against Eritrea last month.

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