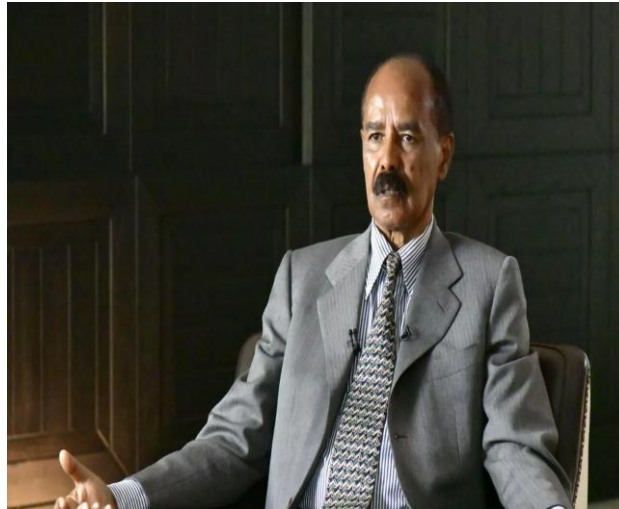


Exclusive: Afwerki on Bilateral Relations With Russia, New World Order, NATO's War on Moscow



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Eritrean leader Isaias Afwerki visited Moscow from May 30 to June 3 to discuss bilateral relations, global and continental issues with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Sputnik Africa asked the Eritrean president to share his view on the role of Russian-African partnership in the context of a rapidly changing world order.

Sputnik Africa: On 24 May of this year, Russia and Eritrea celebrated 30 years of diplomatic relations. How does Eritrea view the prospects for bilateral relations today?

President Afwerki: The relationship goes back more than 30 years. Formal diplomatic relations, yes, 30 years, but during these 30 years we've gone through a very long history. The end of the Cold War, the 90s, and then the last 30 years we have experienced Eritrea, the Russian Federation and other nations. It was a time when humanistic ideologies were there to control the whole world. The end of the Cold War, which was bipolar and then unipolar ideas and ideologies came, and the last 30 years there was a transition, a transition in a global order and bilateral relationships between Eritrea and the Russian Federation within this context. The last 30 years, the diplomatic relationship between the two sovereign nations have gone through this process and is very unique in many ways. And we believe we have learned a lesson from the last 30 years of diplomatic relationships. Now we are entering a new phase, a new global order. And we are determined to work together to see what the future looks like and cooperate

in all fields so that our bilateral relationships within a multilateral context will **move forward** to promote a new order, a new world order.

Sputnik Africa: This is your first official visit to Russia in many years. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Eritrea in January. What does this intensification of contacts mean for the relations between our countries?

President Afwerki: It's not only bilateral. As I mentioned earlier, the visit of Foreign Minister Lavrov was in Asmara. We had a very fruitful discussion on cultivating partnership for the long term, and we had to go through evaluating the experience of the last years, 30 years. How do we move forward? Promote bilateral cooperation programs, but also face the challenges that we jointly face. And a continuation to the meeting in Asmara, there was a meeting where our foreign minister visited Russia, and it was at the Sochi meeting that we further discussed a number of issues on how to promote bilateral cooperation programs. But that should be based within a common understanding, a shared understanding on how the world is moving. And that was very fruitful. Those two discussions were the basis for designing, jointly, a program for the future. How do we manage our bilateral cooperation programs? How can we go beyond that and promote a more broader multilateral relationship? The continent of Africa there is a marginalized continent. We have our subregion, the Horn of Africa, other subregions of the continental level. Now, with the situation globally and the Russian Federation facing challenges from hegemonistic forces, how do we design a common program forward? And those two meetings were very fruitful, as I said. This visit came as a result of those consultations that were undertaken in Asmara and Sochi.

World Order on Brink of 'Radical Transformation,' Afwerki Says at Meeting with Putin

Sputnik Africa: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Eritrean counterpart Osman Saleh Mohammed have previously identified energy, transport infrastructure development, information and communication technology and agriculture as promising areas for cooperation. What plans do you have for implementing joint projects in these sectors? And in what other sectors are plans in store to increase trade between our countries?

President Afwerki: The bilateral cooperation programs are very broad. We have infrastructural programs, ports, airports, roads, railways, ropeways, energy programs inclusive of renewable energy, low thermal energy, agriculture, water management, social programs, education, health, mining, transportation, communications and diplomatic and media cooperations even. It as an integrated cooperation program. Each sector, every industry is involved, we have been developing projects and programs for every

sector and every industry. With the potential of the Russian Federation and given the challenge, the present challenge, there is an understanding that the Russian Federation could make huge contributions in all these areas of cooperation. We start with our bilateral programs, bilateral cooperation programs, are not general issues. We need to concretize, concretize what bilateral cooperation program is. And bilateral cooperation includes or is inclusive of all these details I mentioned. How do we develop projects on infrastructure, for example, roads, railways, ropeways, water energy? So it's a very huge challenge. And we've been working together to identify the areas but go beyond that and jointly consider the mobilization of resources. How do we implement these bilaterally agreed programs in all these areas? Do we have the resources for that. Do we have the time? We need to have a clearly defined time schedule for implementing each and every program. I mean, our bilateral goal, the discussions on all these issues, has been very useful in identifying the needs or assessing the needs, but also mobilizing the resources. Establishing or putting in place mechanisms of implementation and follow up and even mobilization of resource will take stock of an integrated approach. An integrated approach [where] you can't separate one program from the other program, they are interrelated. How do you manage to implement this separate or concrete project so that ultimately they come up with synergy? Synergy is very critical. I think the bilateral, again, is seen within the regional context. Can we isolate our bilateral program or programs of cooperation? Do we need to take stock of a broader scope? So for example, what **would be the multilateral cooperation** program between the Russian Federation and the Horn of Africa, between the Russian Federation and other parts of the continent? It's an interesting topic, but again, I can say that the discussions that took place in Asmara, Sochi, and now it's been a dynamic process where we've been able to clearly understand where we are going. There are global challenges out there. I mentioned earlier, how do we work together so that we can overcome this challenge? It's an interesting approach and I say we are, within the given the circumstances, working together to promote bilateral or shared programs. These are programs, for us, probably will lead to more of a strategic partnership, strategic partnership between Eritrea and the Russian Federation. But this strategic partnerships, bilateral, will be seen in a broader scope where after our own facing the immediate challenge, we can work together to develop the capacity and the capability of facing was the challenge can occur, [the challenge] probably will come in 5 to 10 years.

Sputnik Africa: Moscow has repeatedly noted that Africa is emerging as one of the new centers of multipolarity. Is it fair to say that unipolarity has become obsolete? How does Eritrea see its place and the continent's place in a multipolar world?

President Afwerki: It's very obvious that we have this imbalance, the global imbalance, where Africa remains to be a marginalized continent in spite of the endowment, the natural resources. Africa is supposed to own no less than 60% of global endowment. But still, Africa is marginalized. Africa is backward. Africa is a subsistence economy continent. How could Africa extricate itself from this situation? Develop to a level where partnership will be balanced, and future generations will enjoy programs of change? What I mentioned in terms of sectoral and industrial programs is probably focused on a bilateral issue. Without addressing these multilateral, global and continental issues, it wouldn't make sense to have these bilateral programs succeed. So it has to be seen within a broader scope. The involvement of the Russian Federation in Africa in a number of subregions, every nation in Africa ultimately wants to create a synergy out of these cooperation programs. It is very critical. It's not an option. It's a necessity as for now. This growing partnership between the Russian Federation and each and every sovereign nation in Africa, plus the collective approach of trying to find a broader ground for multilateral cooperation, where we may have a summit here in Moscow in the coming few weeks or two months so that these discussions will continue to see how possibly can the Russian Federation relate to the situation on the continent, and how could governments and nations in Africa engage to promote this partnership that will change the quality of life and enable African peoples to enjoy the resources they have by designing and implementing programs for development? So it's as I said earlier, it's not an option, it's a necessity. And everybody's aware of that. And the Russian Federation is keen to see that this partnership will move forward successfully.

Sputnik Africa: In July, the second Russia-Africa summit will take place. Do you plan to attend?

President Afwerki: I don't need an invitation. I said, I don't need an invitation. I'm there. I don't need to be sensitized because although I say that there is a necessity, this is not a PR occasion. This is an occasion where partnership will have to be built based on a mutually shared understanding.

US Tried to Talk African Leaders Out of Attending Russia-Africa Summit, Moscow Says

Sputnik Africa: Eritrea was among the countries that abstained from voting on the UN GA Resolution condemning Russia's actions. In 2022, Eritrea condemned the sanctions imposed on Russia. Do you feel pressure from the West for your position? Do you detect any pressure in relation to certain projects of cooperation with Russia? If so, which ones?

President Afwerki: There is a problem here. We did not abstain. We were against the imposition of sanctions against the Russian Federation. This is not because we are doing any favors to the Russian Federation. This is war declared on Russia, led by Washington and NATO. It's very clear, it's very simple thing. And as I indicated earlier, this war was declared 30 years ago, probably. After the end of the Cold War, this idea of hegemony came. Control everything and control everything, influence the world, divide the world into areas of influence. And it's not only expanding influence. It was a declaration of war because there was a concept developed by these guys to contain, contain, contain, contain those who can compete, or at least who can share something in the global system. That was not allowed. And because of the background of the Cold War era, this obsession of containing Russia, containing Russia, containing Russia was there for the last 30 years. It's nothing new. If you are containing one nation not to grow, not to compete, not to be able to make its contributions, then you are declaring war. I wouldn't be sitting here waiting for someone to contain me with sanctions, with obstructions, with confusion. This is a declaration of war. And we had our position very clear. Not yesterday or the day before, but we said this is not the kind of all world order that the peoples of all continents need. Nobody needs this kind of policies, hegemony, control and not allow people to grow and work hard to try to change their quality of life. This idea of war in Ukraine or war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is not true at all. This is war declared by NATO and Washington against the Russian Federation for the last 30 years. This has been going on and on and on for the last 30 years. How can you contain Russia, not enable Russia to economically compete, not enable Russia to compete in technology, not allow Russia to compete in industries, not allow Russia to even have influence everywhere? If you have declared this war, then the war is there. It's not a war between Russia and Ukraine. For that matter, our position was clear. We were against this so-called global order or world order. We've been victims of these sanctions. It's not big nations or not powerful nations like Russia or China or anybody else. But even those who don't bow or kneel down to this ideology of hegemony, will have to be punished. Sanctions, sanctions, sanctions. This declaration of war will have to end. This is not a war between Russia and Ukraine. This is a war declared by NATO, led by Washington. And Russia has a right to defend itself. Not alone. It's not an isolated Russia. This is a global issue. And we need an order, a global order or a world order that enables everybody to share, cooperate. Complementarity will have to be there. You can't contain someone you can't contain one nation. You can't force or even use force, all sorts of coercion to subdue nations. This is not acceptable. This is the law of the jungle. We need to get out of this law of the jungle and people will have to be free to live like human beings. No one nation has any right to come and impose its will on anybody else. And Russia had the right to defend itself. Russia is defending itself on behalf of everybody, every

people, everywhere. So the question comes, what is the position of every nation as far as the imposition of sanctions on the Russian Federation or even declaring war against the Russian Federation? Our position was very clear. We are against containment. We are against the domination or hegemony of one nation. We can't accept it. It's not ours specifically. It's a case for everybody; every nation, every people will have to make its position clear. And our support for the Russian Federation against these hegemonistic policies was a natural phenomenon or outcome of what we did also. So it's not a matter of abstaining or supporting or not supporting. It's a matter of taking a position on this phenomenon, which has been there for the last 30 years, and a declaration of war through sanctions or even containment is not acceptable. Now, the containment policy is going to China. China will have to be contained. Again, everybody who is against this hegemonistic ideology will have to be contained. How can we live in a world order that contains, contains and gives one group? And because of their failures NATO does not exist anymore, European Union does not exist. They have failed the last 30 years. They have failed imposing their will. So they cannot, at the expense of the destruction of other economies, other people, survive. I think for us, it was a very natural thing to take our position as far as this declared war is concerned. It is not a matter of taking sides with this or that side. I think even the media will have to understand this reality. People should not come and tell us there is war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. This is not a war between Russian Federation and Ukraine. This is a war declared again on Russia for the last 30 years. So, what is your position or the position of everybody? There are no preferences on this matter. It's a necessity. And you take your position based on your understanding of this phenomenon that we have witnessed the last 30 years.

Sputnik Africa: We see today also another format which is emerging, not only multipolar world, but there is also BRICS format, which is emerging. And many African countries also expressed their interest in it. What do you think? What are your thoughts about it? Do you think it's a promising format in economic terms of cooperation?

President Afwerki: The question is, we have our ideas and our position clear on what we have witnessed the last 30 years. It's not a matter of challenging hegemony. It's not a matter of fighting containment. It's not a matter of fighting sanctions. But what about the future? What do we need in the future? We have to be clear on what the needs are there. We need a new world order. The need for a new world order is obvious. It's a demand for every people, every nation in the world. We need to get out of this cycle of containment, containment now, containment of Russia, the **containment of China**, the containment of Eritrea. Then punishment for this and that. Sanction here, sanction there. It's not a question limited on facing the

challenge. Facing the challenge is one thing, But what about beyond the challenge? Beyond facing the challenge? We have to be clear on where we are going. We have to prepare the ground for creating a new environment. That new environment will have to be there for everybody. Justice to prevail. Nations and people to be allowed to progress. They need to create an arrangement. There has to be a forum. There has to be a platform where everybody will come join for the future. It's not facing this challenge of containment. This will end any time because there is no NATO. NATO will not survive, NATO will not be there. Other hegemonistic arrangements or groups will not prevail. So the question is the future for the people of the world. A global order will have to be there to enable everyone to grow, enable everyone to work and mobilize resources and change quality of life here and there, but also create complementarity, cooperation, working together, respect law, respect international law. Respect the sovereignty of nations. Don't interfere. Stop interfering. Stop sanctioning. Allow people to do their job. So it's not a matter of confronting or even challenging the existing hegemonistic policies of containment, sanctions, interference. No. We have to work together to go beyond the containment we see, beyond the challenge we are facing. So any arrangement, any name for that arrangement within the context of a new world order, a new world order that will enable everyone to make its contributions, participate, cooperate, work together and respect each other and respect international law. So I think it's a transitional issue. It's a transition from the last 30 years of a hegemonistic attempt, which has failed, practically, to go to a new order. That new order will have to be an order that comes as a result of consultations. Consultations bilateral, multilateral, continental. Ultimately, we will arrive at an understanding, and the fundamentals are very clear. But how do you structure this arrangement? How do you structure this global partnership is what is under discussion now, and I can see it's a very healthy way of not only facing the challenges of the day, but also beyond that to create an environment conducive for future generations at the global level.

Features

Sputnik Africa: How do you assess the development of military and technical cooperation between Russia and Eritrea?

President Afwerki: As I mentioned earlier, our bilateral cooperation programs are intensive and extensive. But we focus on developing our human resource capacity, health and education, technology, education, services here and there, how can we design programs for the future. You may need resources, financial resources, equipment, machinery, this and that, but ultimately you also have to have the human resource for implementing programs, our cooperation programs in the field of education, training, vocational technical training, research and development, and

ultimately we will have to equip the future generation to not only face the existing immediate challenge, but build the future. Build the future based on knowledge, future based on skills and occupations that are capable of mobilizing resources and utilizing resources. So, one of the areas of focus in our bilateral partnership with the Russian Federation is to engage in developing our human resource and capacity so that it's enabled to implement programs agreed on this or that sector or industry. Ultimately, this will be the multiplier, it will be the machine behind every project we agree upon. So the comprehensive approach that will include various sectors, economic, social and whatever, plus focus on human resource development and services. Social services are very, very fundamental. So I think it's a very balanced way of promoting bilateral partnership and multilateral. It's not going to be isolated at the bilateral level. We have to see it within a broader context. A broader context will be regional or even continental.

Sputnik Africa: Is it possible to revive the Soviet naval base on the Red Sea?

President Afwerki: It's not Soviet or... it's a very long story. I don't want to go into the details, but there were mistakes. One of the historic mistakes is the dismantling of the Soviet Union. We are not very nostalgic, but again, it was one historic mistake to us and to the group. It's not a matter of individual perception. The cooperation programs will have to include peace and security, peace and stability. This is critical. How can we possibly implement these programs without guaranteeing the stability in one area? Even the bilateral arrangements will have to take stock of this. So it's not a matter of who is where and what are the defense and security programs. Defense and security programs are part of the comprehensive partnership that will have to develop ultimately. It's not a way of allowing one nation or another nation to have a base here, have facilities here. That comes within the broader context. If we are talking about infrastructure, talking about energy, about water programs, about mining, about promoting investments in a number of other industries, we need stability. The fact that we see today, one of the major obstacles of developmental programs at the continental level in Africa or even subregional level is stability. Stability is a prerequisite. So cultivating or developing partnership will require a conducive environment for implementing developmental issues, which will take stock of cooperation in the field of defense and security. How can we work together to guarantee a stable environment for our jointly designed program? So, the sky is the limit. There is no way of which place, where [it is] placed and how to do it. We have to guarantee stability at a bilateral level. We'll have to work together to guarantee that our programs are implemented in a very secure environment. Given the continuous instability, interference from outside forces, the instability that becomes dangerous as

a result of mismanagement and miscalculations within a localized area. We need to go beyond that and create a very stable, peaceful environment, and the security and defense cooperation becomes a natural outcome. It's not a matter of preferring or making arrangements bilateral or multilateral. We have to work together to secure stability in any program we desire. So I don't have any exclusive programs. We are not going backwards and talking about history. History is full of mistakes. Where we are now is the result of our mistakes in a way. And we have to recognize that we have made mistakes, correct these mistakes. But for the future, we need to make arrangements so that we can avoid wasting our time and resources and focus on implementing our programs.

Sputnik Africa: In 2018, the possibility of establishing a Russian logistics hub in the Eritrean port of Asseb on the Red Sea coast was considered, but the initiative does not appear to have made any further headway. Can this project be developed further?

President Afwerki: It's not a matter of having a hub or not having a hub. It's an issue of bilateral cooperation on defense and security. Now, if we have a coastline of 1,100 kilometers or 1,300 kilometers with more than 300 islands in a very sensitive international waterway, we need to develop the infrastructure. We'll have to have an architecture of providing all the services. An airport here, a port here, a harbor here, a dry dock here, a shipyard, a boatyard, electricity, energy, water supply. All sorts of programs will have to be put there. It's not only Eritrea, but the whole region will have to have its own infrastructure program. The interfacing of all this international construction of infrastructure, interconnect infrastructure. You cannot have isolated energy programs in the whole region. You cannot have roads and railways or even airports and harbors totally isolated from each other. There they are interconnected. They have to come to a situation where they can provide the services required for the developmental program, but also provide the services for securing peace and stability. You have to have this infrastructure, you have to have the design, the architecture and work together. The fact that I mentioned earlier, we need to have joint programs, multilateral programs, of securing an environment conducive for implementing this bilateral cooperation programs we are discussing. How do you do it? You need to have the facilities there. The services will have to be available. It's not a matter of one nation coming and putting a base here or another there, or a hub here and a hub there. That's a result of the issue. If we successfully implement what we are negotiating and agreed upon and create an environment, an infrastructure for broader cooperation at the regional level, then we need to learn from our failed experiences in the past and come up with successful programs for the future.

Sputnik Africa: Moscow has stated that it is ready to increase the number of scholarships for your students to study at Russian universities. What are your expectations from cooperating in the field of education? At what stage is an agreement between Eritrea and the Russian Federation on the mutual recognition of diplomas presently in?

President Afwerki: I've discussed this with everybody, but I discussed this exhaustively with President Putin. We are not talking about whether these scholarships are enough or not enough. We need to start by evaluating or assessing the needs. What are the needs? We have all these sectoral and industrial programs, and we are talking about human resource for implementing these programs, training, educating young engineers, professionals, skilled to come and implement this program. How can we create an environment for their training? How do we train them? How many do we need? It's not a matter of emotional judgments on the goodwill that we have. That's not the question. We need to assess project by project the needs of skills and traits that will enable our young citizens to benefit from the learning institutions in Russia. We're not limiting our scholarships to 170, 200, 300. That's another question. We'll have to agree on the needs first and foremost. And we have to provide the services that will enable young people to go to college here, so it may go to 500, may go to 1,000, may go to 300. Who knows? But you have to agree on the methodology or the approach on deciding, and the goodwill of the Russian Federation is there. We are saying we need to do our homework so that we identify the areas or the trade that we need, and then we can decide on the number of scholarships. So there is no limit to what number can we send or how can we benefit from the learning institutions in Russia, and the goodwill of the Russian Federation side is obvious. So let's do our homework. And I arrive at the conclusion where we will say we need this or that trade in the coming few years. And it's a dynamic issue that will take stock of not only one scholarship per year or two years, three years, but it's part of the dynamic process of mobilizing the resources, the human resource we need to implement the agreed upon programs.

Sputnik Africa: Do you think our countries will be able to come back to these topics to discuss it during the Russia-Africa Summit that will be held in July?

President Afwerki: This summit **will have to discuss** everything. If it's not enough, then they can have another summit, whether it's one summit a year or a three-month summit. We have to exhaustively discuss all these issues and arrive at a common understanding and share programs. The limit is not one conference or one location. This is the task. This is a mission. We have to accomplish the mission by organizing meetings that will enable everyone to make contributions. And the consultations ultimately will lead to the

consolidation and the strengthening of the partnership that will have to evolve.