

The Geopolitics of the Red Sea



At this crucial juncture when complex events are unfolding in regard to the Red Sea, the Government of Eritrea (GOE) has nothing to add to the two documents it released in 2019 elucidating the basis of its policy perspectives and precepts on the matter. The first policy paper entitled – “Eritrea’s Stand in Ensuring the Peace and Security of the Red Sea” was re-published on 22 December last month. The second policy paper is being re-published hereunder:

Geostrategic importance of the Red Sea

- The paramount importance of the Red Sea as an international maritime route is corroborated by the number of ships as well as the type and value of freights that transit through the waterway.
- Moreover, the abundance of oil, other minerals as well as natural resources in the region that encapsulate the Red Sea enhance its strategic importance.
- Regional and global aspirations and agendas of domination and hegemony, and resultant rivalries that unfold, imbue it with additional geopolitical dimension.

Eritrea, Eritreans, and The Red Sea –from ancient times until today

- It is well known that prior to the precolonial (19th century) era, Eritrea, and its coastline, was part and parcel of the larger melting pot of civilizations.

- “Eritrea” signified “Red” (in terms of etymology). Indeed, the appellation by Italian colonizers of “Eritrea” to the land that they envisioned as a gateway to their “East African Empire” was not a random or arbitrary choice.
- After World War II, when the US-led Alliance devised its strategic interests of global domination and influence (and designated Israel, Iran, and Ethiopia as its main pillars in the “Middle East”), it chose the Ethiopian regime as a surrogate instrument for controlling the Red Sea and beyond. Indeed, the incessant war and crisis that subsequently raged for half a century were triggered by this same US postulate that maintained: “Eritrea does not serve our strategic interests”. The calculus/impact of the Red Sea’s significance was extremely high and pivotal in the equation.
- The game plan of influence and domination of the Soviet-led Bloc in the context of the Cold War, and the history of rivalry that it entailed in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, was another, second face, of the misguided big-power, policy framework.
- After the independence of Eritrea, and as a continuation of a half-century-long unremitting hostilities, the “Hanish war” was instigated under a putative “maritime boundary dispute”. In reality, there was no good-faith maritime boundary dispute between Eritrea and Yemen. The verdict that awarded “Hanish” to Yemen while simultaneously granting “fishing rights to Eritrea in Yemen’s territorial waters” was another legal subterfuge for stoking perpetual tension.
- After “Hanish”, the “Badme” conundrum was concocted as a continuation or extension of the same, obsolete, game-plan
- Beyond obstruction of the implementation of the Arbitral Award on “Badme” in breach of the rule of law, a “border dispute” with Djibouti, ramped up to a “maritime dispute”, was concocted to deny “any respite” to Eritrea. Again, there was nothing novel in this ploy.
- And despite the presumed “reforms” set in motion in Ethiopia and the “reconciliation/peace” process between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the new schemes on the offing to disrupt the hopes of stability are neither surprising nor new.

- In view of the facts outlined in the skeletal form above, the issue of the Red Sea is not, indeed, a new subject that warrants fresh perspectives for Eritrea and its people.

Fundamental principles and mechanisms for “peace and stability” in the Red Sea

- Adherence to legality and international law without any conditions.
- Non-violation of the sovereignty of peoples and their nations under any pretext.
- Identification and objective monitoring of rivalries that pose threats to “peace and stability” of the Red Sea; (underlying motives of interference; meticulous analysis of timely information on agendas behind “covert” and overt activities).
- Global powers: United States; Russia; China; Japan; France..
- Regional powers: Iran, Turkiye, Israel
- Terrorism (in all its forms)
- Pirates
- Human Traffickers
- Illegal Arms Dealers
- Drug Dealers
- Environmental pollution
- Devising a roadmap and strategic plan on the basis of the objective appraisal and monitoring of information.
- Ensuring coherence and complementarity of the strategic plan with Eritrea’s “neighborhood/regional policy”.
- It is imperative for the countries, located in the sensitive segment of the Red Sea and its environs especially, to possess their own sovereign and effective defense and security institutions in general and potent defense and naval forces in particular as a mandatory task.
- Somalia to come out of the 30-year-long spiral of stalemate and crises and build its own effective institutions. Any substitute must be avoided and not contemplated.
- Yemen’s case: similar to that of Somalia.

- Djibouti to extricate itself from debilitating dependency to build and operate its own national institutions.
- Eritrea to build and possess its own effective institutions.
- Considering its advantages, Saudi Arabia contributes to the collective efforts.
- All the above-mentioned countries ought to be engaged to foster consensus and formulate the requisite legal framework for a joint mechanism so as to eventually shoulder their commitments.
- All the above-mentioned countries will need to establish a “command and control” Coordinating Committee (information sharing, joint exercises . . . etc.)to create synergy through complementarity of their respective resources.
- All the above-mentioned countries will need to work jointly to create a platform for cooperation with willing partners on a mission or task that is beyond their capabilities and that warrants “external” assistance on the basis of common consent.
- Needless to emphasize, attaining this level of effectiveness and cooperation will require time as well as very heavy and tireless endeavours.
- Beyond these fundamental principles and operational mechanisms, Eritrea is not prepared to contemplate involvement in certain activities hastily or through some prodding. Avoiding acrimonious platforms has indeed remained an appropriate historical choice that we have opted for.

Asmara,

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