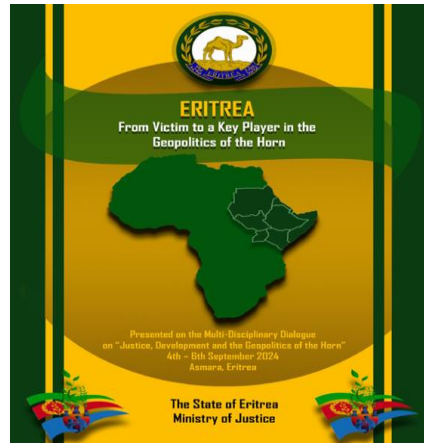


Eritrea from Victim to a Key Player *In the Geopolitics of the Horn*



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Ministry of Justice

Introduction: The countries of the Horn of Africa are creations of geopolitical manoeuvring of colonial powers in the late 19th Century. This fact might be unpalatable for some to swallow but swallow we must. The people of the region have paid dearly for the misadventures of their leaders, intent on realizing fantasies of grandeur fabricated from myths of mist existing only in the imagination of pseudo-historians. If we are to break free from the cycle of war, poverty and backwardness that has plagued our region, we must, as much as possible, face head-on the reality of our history, without shying from the skeletons in the cupboard and building on the noble achievements of our forebears. Only then can we redeem history and leverage it to jointly build a bright future for all.

When the Italians named their newly acquired real-estate in the Horn, Eritrea, the native inhabitants of that land were not consulted nor were they aware that their history has just taken, for better or worse, a new direction. When the Italian masters drafted the natives into the imperial army and forced them to fight their wars, the shared suffering created a germ of a new identity. When the Italian masters recruited the natives to provide back-breaking labour for the

construction of their roads, railways, palaces, cathedrals and monuments, the shared suffering aroused a new sense of togetherness. When the natives were uprooted and congregated into shanty towns, and forced to work as house maids, factory hands, and government clerks for pittance, through their collective suffering they were reborn as Eritreans, while their blood and sweat created Eritrea.

When the Italians were defeated and forced out of Eritrea during the Second World War, Eritreans naively expected, at last, they were going to be masters of their fate, masters of Eritrea. Alas, it was not meant to be. The geopolitics of great power rivalry of the Cold War gave them a rude awakening and a bitter but very important lesson: nobody gives you your freedom, you take it, you take it by force if necessary. Thus began one of the longest wars for liberation. When Eritreans raised-up arms and began fighting for their independence they quickly realized that defeating the enemy was not enough, the demons within must also be vanquished. This two-fronted struggle, allowed Eritrean not only to gain their freedom but also to strengthen the bond of nationhood through the camaraderie of shared sacrifice.

The Eritrean war for liberation was one of the bloodies in the history of the region, and the two brotherly people of Eritrea and Ethiopia paid for the folly of others with their best and brightest and decades of lost opportunities. When Eritrea won its independence, there was hope that it was going to be a new dawn for the peoples of the region, an opportunity to learn from history and restart afresh. Unfortunately, there were people still stuck in old mentality and intent on swimming against the current on the river of history. And like their peers in history their preferred method of operation was to align themselves as retainers of great powers rather than serve the interest of their people by genuinely working to bringing about collective peace, justice and prosperity for the people of the region.

The second war between Eritrea and Ethiopia was even more bloody and costly, but in the heavy price it demanded it reaffirmed the need for

paradigm shift in the way states think about their security and development. The solution to their problems is found within the region and not without; and progress and greatness comes from working together to bring peace, justice and prosperity for the entire region and not from taking the easy way out and handing over our problems, along with our destiny, to others.