

## **Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group's Leaked Report Undermines its Credibility and Neutrality** **Sophia Tesfamariam**

Unable to find credible verifiable evidence against Eritrea, the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group is leaking its latest report to try to influence public opinion, presumably to bolster the SEMG's recommendations vis a vis Eritrea and others before its biased and politically motivated report is officially delivered. The SEMG and Matt Bryden, its coordinator, must be desperate, why else would they engage in such irresponsible acts that call to question their credibility, integrity and independence? The modus operandi that got them the sanctions resolutions against Eritrea does not hold any water under close scrutiny, so today, the SEMG and those behind the sanctions are resorting to even uglier and dirty tricks to penalize Eritrea.

There is nothing in the Monitoring Group's mandate that allows it to make public statements, hold press conferences, "previews" and more, prejudicing Eritrea's right to a fair hearing at the UN Security Council and in the realm of public opinion. The SEMG is supposed to provide its report only to the Sanctions Committee and the Security Council, not to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the media or elsewhere. Today, not only is Matt Bryden, the SEMG's coordinator, openly talking about the SEMG report that no one in the public domain has yet seen, he is also prejudicing the gullible media with his personal opinions and fabricated facts.

For instance, the Voice of America<sup>1</sup> (VoA) reported on an interview he conducted in which he was responding to Eritrea's call for removal of the sanctions and telling reporters that sanctions against Eritrea cannot be removed because Eritrea was not in compliance even though the UN Secretary General had noted Eritrea's said compliance and the SEMG had no evidence to prove that Eritrea was in violation of Resolution. VoA reported that:

**"...Bryden's call for caution comes just hours after Eritrea's U.N. envoy said existing sanctions should be lifted. The envoy cited a pending U.N. report that says investigators found no evidence of Eritrean support for armed groups in Somalia in the past year..."**

But trying to determine Security Council actions before any deliberations is not only presumptuous, but is also a clear indication of his contempt for the SC' intelligence and its ability to discern fact from fiction.

A flurry of diversionary and damning media reports aimed at swaying public opinion against Eritrea have mushroomed in cyberspace in the last couple of days, and Matt Bryden, the coordinator of the SEMG, has been in the lead offering his opinions left and right. Let us take a look at what a 18 July 2012 report<sup>2</sup> on leaderpost.com said:

**"...Matthew Bryden, the Monitoring Group's coordinator, told Reuters that Eritrea was lobbying its allies at the Security Council to push for a removal of the arms embargo, but he**

**said other Council members were reluctant to do this..."We're trying to make the case that any improvement in Eritrea's conduct is the result of sanctions, and that it's too early to lift them because of the other violations they have committed..."**

First of all, Eritrea is in full compliance of Resolution 1907 even though Eritrea maintains that it is an illegal, unjust and unfair resolution. The SEMG's mandate is to verify compliance, not seek "other violations" in order to maintain the sanctions.

Secondly, why is Matt Bryden commenting on a report that Eritrea has yet to get a copy of? It can only be an act of desperation, trying to divert attention from the real culprits by scapegoating Eritrea for the disastrous and destructive policies for Somalia.

Eritrea engaging the members of the Security Council is not "lobbying", rather it is what countries do at the UN to make sure that the issues that the Security Council members have to decide on, are clear. Despite what Matt Bryden and Susan E. Rice, the US Ambassador to the UN, believe, Eritrea is entitled to address the UNSC, present Eritrea's side of the story, insist that independently verifiable evidence is produced and that the SC makes informed decisions in line with the UN Charter and international law.

Matt Bryden seems to believe that he can place individuals on the UN list based on his own personal opinions. He can do that with the US list, as we have seen in the case of a couple of Eritreans placed on it just last week. The UN rejected the US' request and underhanded attempt to get them placed on the UN list. Bryden, in his interview with the VoA said:

**"...It's quite possible that some of those named in the report will eventually be designated. But this decision is for the Council and its member states. When the final version of the report is released [in a few days], there will be evidence in the public domain..."**

When the final version of the report is released "in a few days", there ought to be irrefutable, verifiable concrete evidence as it is the rights of these individuals that are being violated left and right, their reputations sullied and their safety and security threatened...in other words, Matt Bryden and his ilk do not have a god given right to do as they please and insult the intelligence of Africans, especially Eritreans, at will. Using his position on the SEMG to advance his personal agendas in the region will not bode well for his already fledgling credibility and reputation in the region. He may soon find out that he is persona non grata in the entire region...

Speaking of being PNGd- (i.e., declared **persona non grata**), seems he is not allowed to enter Somalia and it's obvious from the various statements made by Somalis that he is not considered a friend of Somalia. According to an 18 July 2012 report posted at Garoweonline<sup>3</sup>, a Somali

online news outlet, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, US and Ethiopia's choice to lead Somalia's Transitional National Government (TNG) is quoted as saying:

**"...Matt Bryden is not ashamed to support the division of Somalia into two countries. Matt Bryden has a track record of being against the restoration of peace in Somalia... We believe that the U.N. Security Council does a good job, but the Monitoring Group and Matt Bryden is wrong approach for Somalia's peace and development..."**

Sheikh Sharif Ahmed took issue with Matt Bryden and his group's suggestion that a "Joint Management Board" be established. According the report:

**"...President Sharif spoke mockingly of the proposed Joint Financial Management Board...President Sharif said: "We asked: 'What is the job of the Joint Financial Management Board?' They said the JFMB will manage TFG revenue from sources like Mogadishu port and airport. So we asked: 'Do Somalis manage international funding to Somalia?' They say 'No. But we will start with managing Somali assets.' So can we accept unknown persons to manage our funds? Revenue is the basis of government and we cannot allow others to manage our funds."..."**

Surely Sheikh Sharif doesn't really believe that he is going to be "allowed" to make such decisions when his government relies entirely on foreign forces and when his TFG is "propped up" by those who pay his salary, train TFG forces etc. etc. does he? The irony with the good Sheikh's outrage is, that he was one of the emasculated "IGAD leaders" summoned to participate in Susan E. Rice's elaborate drama presented to the Security Council on 5 December 2012, where he joined Meles Zenawi in presenting anti-Eritrea statements and calling on the UNSC to monitor Eritrea's finances. Go figure!

But if it is any consolation, Sheikh Sharif ought to know that no matter what else he is barred from doing in his own country, he certainly can PNG Bryden...Looks like there may be more countries that will PNG Bryden in the future... His witch-hunting seems to be reserved for those who get in the way of US and Ethiopian agendas. This time, it is South Africa...

Let us take a look at what the 18 July 2012 report says about South Africa:

**"...A report by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, obtained on Monday by various news agencies, has already titillated the wires with bold headlines...The Monitoring Group is ultimately tasked with investigating possible violations of United Nations arms embargoes against Somalia and Eritrea, so what exactly has it found that draws the South African government into the murky world of arms smuggling and conflict in the Horn of Africa..."**

Since this author does not have a copy of the SEMG report, there is not much to say yet, but it will not be hard to deduce where this is coming from.

It should be recalled that the SEMG was scolded by South Africa on 5 December 2012. The various statements made that day surrounded the transparent drama orchestrated by the US Ambassador to the UN and her surrogates at IGAD, led by Meles Zenawi, her personal friend and confidante. The President of Eritrea had requested to address the Security Council and for reasons only she knows, Susan E. Rice was adamant about keeping him away. But other Security Council members wanted to hear Eritrea's version of the truth, but sadly, they were denied that opportunity and they were all coerced into going along with the US, knowing full well that they did not have all the facts.

South Africa was one of the countries that wanted to hear what Eritrea's President had to say. Ambassador Baso Sangqu, South Africa's Ambassador told Inner City Press the following:

**"...I don't [see] there [is] anything wrong with hearing from the President of Eritrea..."**

According to Inner City Press "several Council members said "only the US" -- is opposed to Afwerki speaking to the Council". November's President of the Council Portuguese Ambassador Cabral for his part "said that if a country which is on the Security Council's agenda asks to be heard, it should be. You can discuss the format, but the country should be heard."

So why pick on South Africa?

Well, the South Africa's Ambassador Mashabane , after the elaborate drama surrounding the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2023, had something more to say that day. According to the UN Press Statement<sup>4</sup> issued on 5 December 2011

**"...He called on the Monitoring Group to follow its mandate and closely guard its independence in the work it did to assist the Council...He was disappointed that Eritrea was not afforded the same opportunity to address the Council along with others in the morning..."**

That must have touched Ms. Susie's raw nerve...and bruised the SEMG's ego.

But it was not only South Africa that was questioning the veracity of the information in the SEMG's report, "evidence" provided by Ethiopia. In its 5 December report, Inner City wrote:

**"...Churkin [Russia's Ambassdor to the UN] also said that the Security Council wasn't given sufficient proof of Eritrea allegedly trying to attack the African Union summit in Addis Ababa. Then he closed the meeting...When Inner City Press asked Churkin about his doubts, he said that the Council wasn't given probative information..."**

Bryden obviously cannot go after Russia and Portugal-way out of his league, so he decided to intimidate an African nation, because he believes he can get away with that.

The Russians and Chinese abstained in 2011 and according to the UN Press Statement report Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations said:

**“... his country had abstained in the vote on the current resolution, even though he understood the many concerns expressed today by IGAD member States... However, regarding certain reported incidents, the Security Council had not been presented with proof of the perpetrators of the reported attack. When it came to guiding the Security Council, he said guidance should be given by the resolution, and not by another body, which could lead to different interpretations of the text...”**

The Security Council cannot delegate to Member States (or regional organizations such as IGAD or AU) the competence to make an Article 39 determination. UN member States delegated to the Council the competence to decide that a threat to, or breach of, the peace had occurred or that such a situation had ceased to exist on the condition that it would be the Council which is the only entity exercising this power. Resolution 1907 and 2023 which imposed sanctions on the State of Eritrea and its people are Susan E. Rice’s “African Initiative”, delivered by the “African bloc”, which is a shameful cover for a US initiative presented by an “African face” - a violation of Article 39 of the UN Charter.

On 5 December 2010, when Inner City Press asked Susan E. Rice about the lack of independently verifiable evidence in the SEMG’s report, this is what Rice unashamedly and arrogantly stated:

**“...The Ethiopian Government enabled every embassy in Addis Ababa that wished to come and view the evidence themselves. Some took the opportunity to do so; others didn't. I don't understand the basis for Russia's claim that the evidence was not available or not compelling. From the United States' point of view, we have every confidence in the veracity of that evidence...”**

If Meles Zenawi, her friend and confidante says so, it must be true...Alas, such is the world according to Ms. Susie...

While Eritrea is still being denied a copy of the SEMG’s latest report, as if his interviews and leaks were not enough, now the SEMG is providing “previews”. Matt Bryden and his partners have decided to brainwash the public ahead of the Report’s release. By scapegoating, blaming Eritrea for all that ails Somalia and by creating confusion by presenting many unrelated issues in the same report, the SEMG is hoping to sway public opinion and with it lawmakers and Security Council members. The SEMG has resorted to brainwashing by saturation and diversion as its

latest tactic. What is saturation? According to Dr. Cynthia Boaz, assistant professor of political science at Sonoma State University,

**“...There are three components to effective saturation: being repetitive, being ubiquitous and being consistent. The message must be repeated over and over, it must be everywhere and it must be shared across commentators: e.g. "Saddam has WMD." Veracity and hard data have no relationship to the efficacy of saturation. There is a psychological effect of being exposed to the same message over and over, regardless of whether it's true or if it even makes sense, e.g., "Barack Obama wasn't born in the United States." If something is said enough times, by enough people, many will come to accept it as truth...”**

Using “conflict resolution”, “peace building” and other sugar coated labels for the various organized forums, the SEMG is provided a platform from which to spew its anti-Eritrea sentiments. One such affair was held at Michael S. Ansari Africa Center. Here is what was posted on its website<sup>5</sup>:

**“...The Michael S. Ansari Africa Center hosted a breakfast briefing and discussion today [17 July 2012] on the political and security situation in Somalia and the Greater Horn of Africa by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea. Matt Bryden, coordinator of the Monitoring Group, Ghassan Schbley, its finance expert; and Emmanuel Deisser, its arms expert, previewed their forthcoming comprehensive report to the UN Security Council’s Sanctions Committee...Participating in the event, moderated by Ansari Center Director J. Peter Pham, were US government officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and Horn of Africa experts several universities and think tanks...”**

This is tantamount to providing the jury, in this case everyone represented by the participants, , damning information about a defendants, Eritrea and others, without allowing the accused equal opportunity to refute the report, and before the judge, in this case the UNSC, has even deemed it, the report and its said evidence, as being acceptable or admissible. This is an abrogation of its responsibilities and further compromises the SEMG’s credibility, integrity and neutrality.

It should therefore come as no surprise if J. Peter Pham, and other hired intellectuals like him, produce reports to spin the SEMG’s report as soon as it is released. Judging from the various news items relating to the “leaked” SEMG report and its public relations effort before the report is even published suggests that the SEMG and its handlers are not very confident about the product...hence the advance sale.

The political agendas of its handlers and that of the SEMG’s role in advancing illicit political agendas using the SEMG as cover are becoming clearer with each report. The UN Security Council must remove Matt Bryden and the team as they have severely undermined the

credibility of the Monitoring Group and cannot possibly present an objective, neutral and credible report on Eritrea, or Somali for that matter.

The UN Security Council must provide the new SEMG clear guidelines, clear mandate and clear code of conduct for its work. The UN Security Council must annul the illegal, unfair and unjust sanctions against the State of Eritrea and its people as they are based on fabrications and unfounded allegations by the US and its surrogates in the Horn.

The rule of law must prevail over then law of the jungle!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/07/17/un-investigator-too-early-to-lift-eritrean-sanctions/> accessed 17 July 2012

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.leaderpost.com/news/report+says+Eritrea+reduced+support+Shabaab/6944208/story.html#ixzz210SWuzbv> accessed 17 July 2012

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia\\_27/UN\\_Monitoring\\_Group\\_is\\_against\\_peace\\_in\\_Somalia\\_says\\_President\\_Sharif.shtm](http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/UN_Monitoring_Group_is_against_peace_in_Somalia_says_President_Sharif.shtm) accessed 17 July 2012

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10471.doc.htm> accessed 17 July 2012

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.acus.org/event/briefing-somalia-un-monitoring-group> accessed 17 July 2012