

SPECIAL REPORTS

AFRICOM's \$6 billion fiasco in Djibouti

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ASMARA, Eritrea -- The USA African Command (AFRICOM) is building their new African megabase in the tiny Horn of African country of Djibouti. The first phase is costing \$2 billion, according to reports, and eventually another \$4 billion will be spent. This latest expansion of USA imperial might, this time on African soil, is turning into a fiasco for the Pentagon and US State Department.

To understand why one must review the recent history in the region. Djibouti is and has been little more than a province of Ethiopia. It was a French colony and continues to host a significant French military base. Since 9-11, the USA military has been feverishly trying to find a site for a major military presence in a strategic place in Africa. Unfortunately for the Pentagon, no African country with a suitable site will allow the USA to set up shop there.

So enter Djibouti. With a population of about 500,000, and one of the poorest countries on the planet, Djibouti sits at the entrance to the Red Sea, through which passes much of the world's shipping, including a sizable portion of the oil used in Europe and Asia. The USA made the Djiboutian president an offer he couldn't refuse and now the concrete is being poured and the new runways and docks are growing out of the sand and desert of the North African coastline of the Indian Ocean.

Most of Djibouti's income is a result of almost all of Ethiopia's imports passing through Djibouti's port. Ethiopia used to use the port of Assab, part of its colony of Eritrea. In 1991, after a 30-year independence war, Eritrea won its independence from Ethiopia by defeating the Ethiopian army and chasing out of Ethiopia the former Soviet client regime of Haile Mengistu Mariam. With independence, the port of Assab, Ethiopia's main access to the ocean, became part of the newly independent country of Eritrea.

Now many of Online Journal's readers may be aware that Ethiopia, with the USA's instigation and funding, invaded Somalia in Dec 2006 after the Union of Islamic Courts began to defeat the Ethiopian/USA-backed Somali warlords and started to build a new government in Somalia for the first time since 1991.

What almost no one in the West seems to know is that Ethiopia, instigated and funded by the USA and other Western countries, started a war with Eritrea in 1998 and carried out an invasion of Eritrea in 2000 in an attempt to regain their former colony (see Antiwar.com, [US Behind Invasion of Eritrea](#), June 2000, Thomas C Mountain).

The deal the USA made with Ethiopia was that Ethiopia would destroy Eritrea with the West's help and the USA would get a major port and international airport in Assab, strategically situated very near to the entrance to the Red Sea. Ethiopia would regain use of the Port of Assab, something dear to the heart of Ethiopian chauvinists.

After some desperate fighting in May and June of 2000, the Eritrean army crushed the Ethiopian invasion and was about to launch a counter offensive that could very likely have seen Eritrean tanks

once again rolling through the streets of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, when the USA sent an aircraft carrier task force to the Red Sea and told Eritrea if they did so, the USA would attack them.

Since June of 2000, there has existed a no war no peace situation (something fostered by the USA) between Ethiopia and Eritrea while the West and the USA, in particular, continues to allow the diversion of billions of dollars in supposedly humanitarian aid to the Ethiopian military, the largest and best equipped in Africa.

Coming back to the Africom fiasco in Djibouti, when the Eritreans found out that the USA was building a major military base in Djibouti the Eritreans did what was prudent and made sure their military secured Eritrean high ground overlooking Djibouti.

It must have come as an unpleasant surprise for the USA military to find the entire AFRICOM base within potential range of Eritrean artillery, some 60 miles or so. One can only imagine the red-faced rage experienced by the generals in the Pentagon when they arrived at work one morning and were given the satellite images of Eritrean troops looking down from Eritrean soil on AFRICOM's spanking new base being built on the Djiboutian coast. The Eritreans could, if they so desire, bring their artillery up onto the mountain tops and shut down the new AFRICOM base on a moment's notice.

Eritrea, of course, is not stupid, and has no desire to start any war with the USA. Eritrea is not about to wave a red flag in the face of the USA military bull and there is no evidence or even suggestion that Eritrea has stationed any artillery overlooking Djibouti. On the other hand, Eritrea has lost a lot of blood winning its independence, something the USA was bitterly against from the very beginning, and very prudently made sure that its territory bordering Djibouti, very strategic high ground, was secure. Ethiopia has already occupied Eritrean territory on the Eritrean/Ethiopian/Djibouti border and continues to occupy Eritrean territory captured during the 2000 invasion. Eritrea, a fiercely proud and independent country, is not about to sit back and allow any further violation of its national territory.

To put it mildly, the USA is very unhappy having Eritrean troops in such a strategic position vis--vis their new base, which explains why the Djiboutian army attempted to capture the Eritrean military positions overlooking the new AFRICOM base last year. In short order, the battle hardened veterans of the Eritrean Defense Forces destroyed the Djiboutian invasion attempt and Eritrean boys still sit in their trenches overlooking the AFRICOM megabase in Djibouti.

What the generals in the Pentagon plan to do about this is anyone's guess. The quick manner in which the Eritrean army crushed the Djiboutian incursion and the near mutinies reportedly taking place in the Djiboutian military over having to attack their former colleagues from Eritrea on behalf of the USA has left the USA with little room to maneuver.

The USA has tried bluffing Eritrea by ramming through a resolution in the UN Security Council demanding, in violation of international law and the UN's own charter, that Eritrea withdraw its troops from its own territory. Eritrea has quite rightly denounced such demands and ,with its bluff called, the USA is left with egg on its face.

One thing for sure is that the USA is not going to find it easy to swallow that fact that their new AFRICOM base in Djibouti has become a 6 billion dollar fiasco and made the USA military look like fools.

For more of the real deal stay tuned to Online Journal, the only place for news about the Horn of Africa that the so-called 'Free Press' in the West has failed to cover.

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