

### 3. ERITREA: THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE AND THE STRUGGLES OF INDEPENDENCE

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#### **TIMELINE**

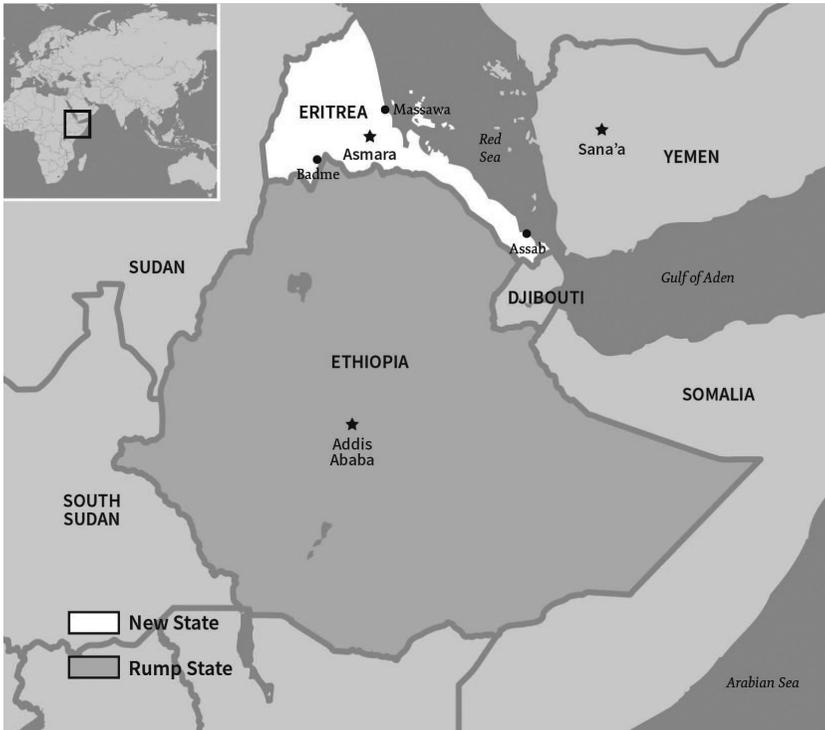
1952	UN federates Eritrea with Ethiopia after British and Italian administration
1962	Eritrean Assembly votes to join Ethiopia fully
Early 1960s	War for independence begins; the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) is founded
1970	Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) founded as an alternative rebel group
1974	The Derg military committee takes power in Ethiopia and abolishes the monarchy
1975	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) forms to fight the Derg
Mid-1970s	Ethiopian forces drive Eritrean rebels from the cities
1981	EPLF defeats the ELF and becomes the dominant Eritrean rebel faction
1989	TPLF occupies much of northern Ethiopia and creates the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)
1991	EPRDF takes Addis Ababa and EPLF takes Asmara, effectively ending the war; Isaias and Meles agree to a referendum on Eritrea's future status

1993	UN referendum finds overwhelming support for independence; Eritrea formally declares independence and receives international recognition
1994	EPLF transforms itself into a political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, making Eritrea a one-party state
1997	Draft constitution ratified by the constituent assembly
1998	Tensions over port access, borders, and currency trigger the Eritrean-Ethiopian war; estimated 70,000–100,000 people are killed
June 2000	Cease-fire agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea
December 2000	Algiers Agreement ends the war and creates the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC)
September 2001	Eritrean government officials and their supporters are arrested for a letter criticizing Isaias and calling for his resignation
2002	EEBC determines that Badme belongs to Eritrea
2009	United Nations, with African Union and U.S. support, imposes sanctions on Eritrea; the economy collapses

Eritrea's saga of achieving independence in 1993 entails a brutal 30-year war and the mobilization of a remarkable national liberation movement. In the late nineteenth century, this small state in the Horn of Africa suffered under the colonial domination of the Italians, followed by Ethiopia's imperialism and military rule. Self-determination, not secession, was sought by Eritrean nationalists because they never accepted colonial rule or Ethiopia's sovereignty. After a war that included near victory in the mid-1970s, internecine splits, and a strategic retreat to a mountain redoubt in the far northwest, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) defeated the Soviet-backed Ethiopian army and seized control of all of Eritrea in May 1991.

The postwar independence era started with great hopes, a referendum in which 99 percent of the population voted in favor of independence, the

Figure 3.1. Map of Eritrea



conversion of the rebel movement into a ruling party, and the creation of a consultative process to write a new constitution. In 1998, however, a border war broke out with Ethiopia, resulting in the almost complete militarization of Eritrean society. In 2001, a group of leaders who played key roles in the liberation war demanded political reforms and were arrested by President Isaias Afwerki. Since then Eritrea has experienced the complete closure of political space, economic decline, international sanctions, and isolation. It ranks near the bottom of global assessments regarding democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and free media.

### THE ORIGINS OF ERITREA

Eritrea's population of 4 to 6 million is divided into nine officially recognized ethnic groups. The Tigrinya population makes up approximately

50 percent of the total and the Tigre approximately 30 percent. The remaining 20 percent is distributed across the Saho, Afar, Bilen, Nara, Ras-haida, Hedareb, and Kunama. Four religions are recognized—Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Catholicism, and Lutheranism. Geographically, Eritrea includes a central highland plateau largely populated by Tigrinya agriculturalists, the western lowland inhabited by Tigre, and the southeastern territory along the Red Sea by Afar and Saho. Historically, these divisions often made Eritrean unity difficult and provided the basis for divide-and-rule tactics by both the Italians and Ethiopians. But the protracted struggle for independence created a strong sense of a unified Eritrean identity.

Eritrea's existence as a political entity began with the creation of the Italian colony along the Red Sea. Prior to that time, today's Eritrea had links to Ottoman authorities along the coast and with Ethiopian royal authorities in the central highlands. Italy did not enter the race for colonies until the 1880s when it established its foothold in the Red Sea port of Massawa. Following the Battle of Adwa in 1896, Italy consolidated its colony with the agreement of Ethiopian emperor Menelik.

During the imperial period, Italy regarded Eritrea as a settler colony, investing in infrastructure (notably the Asmara–Massawa railroad) and manufacturing in urban areas. After the British army defeated Italian forces in East Africa in 1943, these investments ended and the British Military Administration (BMA) removed and sold industrial plants and equipment. The BMA, however, did allow Eritreans to form political parties (often along religious lines), labor unions, and other independent social organizations.

The BMA governed Eritrea until 1952, when a controversial UN decision federated the former colony with Imperial Ethiopia. The norm that former colonies should be given independence was not in place in the early 1950s, and the United States, along with other major powers, thought its security interests would be best served by linking Eritrea with Ethiopia. Some lowland Eritreans, mobilized in the Muslim League, opposed the federation while some highlanders and those linked to the Orthodox Church supported closer ties with Ethiopia's Christian elites. The Italian and British administrations had left Eritreans with an assembly, political parties, commercialized agriculture, and a manufacturing sector unlike any in Ethiopia. The Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation existed as an awkward hybrid, merging an autonomous region that had an elected assembly with

an imperial, absolutist system. In 1962, the Eritrean Assembly voted—in a cloud of controversy, bribery, coercion, and boycotts—to end the federation and join Ethiopia as its fourteenth province.<sup>1</sup>

The Eritrean independence movement was born out of the absolutism of the Ethiopian imperial state and a growing sense of Eritrean nationalism and grievance. Emperor Haile Selassie ruled through a feudal system of local nobility, close relations with the Orthodox Church, and a series of clients. A repressive security apparatus arrested dissidents and limited independent political and civic space. External powers, most notably the United States, which had an important military communications facility in Eritrea, supported Haile Selassie.

By the late 1960s, dissent within Ethiopia and Eritrea grew among the increasingly educated youth and university students. The Ethiopian Student Movement raised fundamental questions about the nature of imperial rule.<sup>2</sup> Ethiopian and Eritrean students in the United States and Europe brought home commitments to Marxism-Leninism and a frustration at what they viewed as their backward homelands. Highly politicized students demanded land reform, as captured in the popular demand for “Land to the Tiller.” They engaged in heated debates around the “nationalities question,” which asked whether or not Eritreans had the right to self-determination. By the mid-1970s, opposition had spread in the form of military mutinies, mass demonstrations, and demands for the arrest of top government officials. The military formed a committee (known as the Derg) that eventually seized power in what was labeled the “Creeping Coup.” The emperor was then deposed.

### **THE ARMED STRUGGLE: 1961 TO 1991**

The Eritrean rebellion against Ethiopian rule began in the early 1960s. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) led the struggle in its early years. This insurgent movement was organized initially by students in Cairo and had strong support from Muslim, lowland Eritreans, and from some leaders in the Arab world.<sup>3</sup> The exiled leadership controlled the flow of weapons and financial support from Ba’athist states such as Syria and Iraq, but the soldiers were recruited locally on the basis of clan and religious networks. The ELF organized its struggle by establishing autonomous military units, following the model of the Algerian National Liberation Front

(FLN). In practice, these divisions tended to replicate ethnic, religious, and regional identities.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ELF attracted more and more recruits from the Christian highlands, creating a tension that contributed to an internal crisis in the early 1970s. These divisions eventually led to the creation of a breakaway faction in 1970, known as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The leadership of the EPLF tended to draw from highland Tigrinyas and to be more leftist in its orientation, reflecting the general direction of the Ethiopian Student Movement. The EPLF first defined itself as a revolutionary vanguard but later as a broad front that included a range of ideological positions unified around the independence issue.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1970s, the ELF and EPLF coexisted, although often with high levels of hostility. The insurgents seemed close to victory in the mid-1970s as Ethiopia went through a revolution that provoked armed conflict on several fronts simultaneously. A bloody internecine conflict for dominance within the liberation movement raged from 1972 to 1974. This intra-Eritrean fighting "reproduced communal divisions as leaders and fighters sought to defend their positions through a reliance on relatives, clans, and tribes."<sup>5</sup> With significant assistance from the Soviet Union and Cuba, Ethiopia successfully pushed the rebels out of Asmara into their mountain redoubts in the northwest. In 1981, the EPLF eventually defeated the ELF and served as the dominant rebel organization engaging in the armed struggle for Eritrean independence until victory in 1991.

The EPLF operated as a highly disciplined, hierarchically organized insurgent force. The armed movement helped overcome the societal divisions of Eritrea to create a united liberation movement. The rebel force exercised strict democratic centralism. The organization was marked by its "clandestinity and an endemic culture of public silence" during the war.<sup>6</sup> The insurgents developed complex systems of administration in territory that they liberated, particularly in the northwestern Sahel. Political education and socialization were given priority. Trained cadres maintained links between the political and military struggles. The EPLF was proud of the medical services it provided to soldiers and civilians. Small-scale workshops, hidden in caves, produced uniforms, sandals, and parts for captured weapons.<sup>7</sup> The EPLF committed itself to equality, and an estimated 30 percent of its fighters were women.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways, the EPLF operated as a proto-state during the armed struggle, running its own economic and social policies and providing “government” services. In liberated areas, the EPLF introduced land reform, rural cooperatives, and locally elected councils.<sup>9</sup> Organization served both to provide autonomous administration and to control the population in order to serve the armed struggle. The EPLF’s reach extended to refugees in camps in Sudan, and the front had a strong presence within the diaspora in North America and Europe, where it engaged in lobbying and extensive fund-raising.

While the Muslim–Christian dichotomy reflected the underlying diversity of the Eritrean population and different ethnic identities were recognized, the EPLF positioned itself as a national liberation movement that framed its struggle as fighting for the united Eritrean nation. The movement insisted, “There are no differences among Eritreans on the goal of national independence.”<sup>10</sup> Some groups, notably the Kunama and the Afar, included segments that were more ambivalent about Eritrean nationalism and that retained ties to kin in Ethiopia. However, people from all ethnic and religious backgrounds participated in the armed struggle and contributed to the construction of a new Eritrean identity that grew out of the enormous sacrifices experienced during the war.

The Eritrean independence struggle lacked major international supporters. Many in Africa regarded with suspicion any effort seeking to redraw lines of sovereignty. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) explicitly rejected any change to colonial boundaries. After the Ethiopian revolution (1974 to 1977), the United States and the Soviet Union switched clients in the Horn of Africa, with Moscow shifting its support from Somalia to Ethiopia. Washington did not provide military assistance to the EPLF or to the rebels in Ethiopia, perceiving these groups to be Marxist and therefore not good candidates for the anti-Soviet Reagan Doctrine.

The Eritrean liberation struggle did receive some critical international support. Perhaps most importantly, Sudan allowed the EPLF to use its territory to ship supplies, and the Sudanese town of Kassala became a major hub for the movement. Large numbers of Eritreans fled to refugee camps in Sudan as well. During the famine of the mid-1980s, Eritrea received cross-border humanitarian support from northern European donors through the Emergency Relief Desk.<sup>11</sup> The Eritrean diaspora served as a key wing of the movement, lobbying and raising funds in Europe and North America. Finally, the EPLF had a complicated set of relationships

with the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in northern Ethiopia and, to a lesser extent, the Oromo Liberation Front. While contentious, the relationships benefited the EPLF by making it harder for the Ethiopian army to resupply its troops in Eritrea.<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1970s, internal divisions within the Eritrean liberation movement and massive support from the Soviet Union allowed the Derg to rebalance itself and push the EPLF out of the cities and towns and toward the sparsely populated northwest around the town of Nakfa. The Ethiopian military unleashed massive military campaigns but could not remove the EPLF from dug-in positions in the mountains. Following classic Maoist guerrilla doctrine, the EPLF organized a "strategic retreat," giving up land rather than engaging Ethiopian forces in combat.

By the late 1980s, Ethiopia's military was in shambles. President Mengistu Haile Mariam had executed its most competent generals after a failed coup attempt and morale had plummeted.<sup>13</sup> The Soviet Union, undergoing its own transformation under President Mikhail Gorbachev, informed Mengistu that Moscow would not renew its defense and cooperation agreement with Ethiopia. In 1988, the EPLF won a major battle at Afabet, which shifted the military balance. The TPLF transformed from a relatively small force capable of hit-and-run attacks to an insurgent army that occupied most of Tigray (the region that borders Eritrea to the south) by 1989. Afterward, the TPLF created the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and began to move toward Addis Ababa. By 1990, the EPLF controlled most of Eritrea and the TPLF-led EPRDF moved toward the Ethiopian capital.

### **PEACE AND THE LEGACIES OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE, 1991 TO 1998**

Mengistu fled Addis Ababa in May 1991. It was then clear the EPLF would be victorious in its war to liberate Eritrea and that the EPLF's allies in the TPLF-led EPRDF would lead the next government in Ethiopia. U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs Herman Cohen convened a meeting in London of major rebel groups and what was left of the Derg regime. By the time the talks commenced, military reality on the ground had already determined the outcome.<sup>14</sup>

The EPLF took control of Eritrea's capital, Asmara, on May 24, 1991, effectively ending the 30-year struggle. The EPRDF seized power in Addis

Ababa four days later. Isaias Afwerki announced that his movement would cooperate with, but not join, the transitional government organized by the EPRDF. The EPLF established a separate provisional government, which it framed as merely “formalizing an administration that has existed in Eritrea for 15 years.”<sup>15</sup> The government of the de facto independent state of Eritrea waited until the United Nations organized a referendum in April 1993 to officially declare de jure independence. The outcome was never in doubt: the United Nations certified that 99.83 percent of the ballots had been cast for independence. The process of holding a referendum mattered to the Eritrean movement because it regarded the UN decision to federate the former Italian colony with Ethiopia as the beginning of the struggle for decolonization and independence. In this framing, Eritrea had been denied its legitimate independence first by the Ethiopian empire and then by the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. However, the legitimacy of its claims for self-determination rested on its status as a former colony.

International recognition followed immediately and with little drama for two reasons. First, the EPLF had won the war and occupied all of Eritrea. Military domination, rather than international diplomacy or law, determined Eritrea’s independence and recognition. Second, the new Ethiopian regime led by Meles Zenawi and the EPRDF welcomed the referendum and supported independence for Eritrea. Ethiopia was the first state to recognize the new state after the 1993 referendum. Without any objection from the state that was notionally “losing” a province, it was untenable for other international actors to object.<sup>16</sup>

The new regime initially enjoyed widespread international support. Having defeated the brutal regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the change in leadership offered an opportunity for pragmatic governing along with a renewed commitment to its people. Washington saw Eritrea (along with Ethiopia and Uganda) as a group of “impressive new leaders” in Africa and worked with these three states in pursuit of regional objectives, notably the containment of the National Islamic Front regime in Sudan.<sup>17</sup>

Eritrea’s international support came despite Asmara’s deep criticism of international organizations. The EPLF did not forget that it had had few supporters among the major powers or international organizations and prided itself on self-reliance and autonomy during the war. EPLF leader Isaias Afwerki said in his inaugural speech to the OAU that joining it

“was not spiritually gratifying” because it was a “nominal organization that has failed to deliver on its pronounced goals and objectives.”<sup>18</sup> Many in the West saw this stance as a refreshing commitment to pursuing development on its own terms rather than acquiescing to international policy agendas.

From 1991 until 1998, Ethiopia and Eritrea had what appeared to be cooperative relations. The two states and their leaders appeared ready to put aside past conflicts and to work together on a broad range of economic and diplomatic issues. Initially, both used the same currency (the Ethiopian birr) and Ethiopia retained access to the Eritrean port of Assab. Large numbers of Eritreans living in Ethiopia participated in the 1993 Eritrean referendum, with polling stations set up in Addis Ababa and around the country, and these citizens retained their Ethiopian passports.

In 1994, the EPLF formally transformed itself from an insurgent organization to a ruling party and launched the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). In the immediate postwar period, the ruling party was enormously popular, having delivered the independence so many Eritreans desired. Former rebel movement leaders became the leadership of the provisional government. The PFDJ was established as the sole legal political party in Eritrea. It ruled first through a party-selected central committee and then (after the PFDJ’s third congress in 1994) by a party-selected transitional parliament.<sup>19</sup> The PFDJ initiated a consultative process to write the first constitution for independent Eritrea. A 50-member commission and 10-member executive committee oversaw the process. It was charged with the duty to organize and manage “a wide-ranging and all-embracing national debate and education through public seminars and lecture series on constitutional principles and practices.”<sup>20</sup> After two years of public consultation, the commission sent the draft to the constituent assembly, which quickly ratified the constitution on May 23, 1997. While ratified, the constitution has yet to be implemented.

Economically the new state started from a very low base, having suffered through 30 years of war. It had, however, a significant and strategically important Red Sea coastline, the prospect of obtaining considerable revenue in port fees, and optimistic expectations regarding the development of gold and other natural resources. The Eritrean diaspora remained a crucial source of revenue. Ruling authorities envisioned Eritrea, with its industrious and hardworking population, as developing into a Red Sea

Singapore or a state like the Asian Tigers. The Eritrean state retained ownership of all land—rural and urban—making its role in the economy overwhelmingly dominant.<sup>21</sup>

Eritrea's history of achieving independence without significant external assistance led it to value autonomy and to view international financial institutions and nongovernmental organizations with suspicion. The PFDJ's National Charter of 1994 emphasized "self-reliance in all fields" and, in terms of the economy, "to rely on internal capabilities and develop internal capacities." Fear of dependency made the regime wary of traditional international assistance. Autonomy, the movement long argued, enhances independent thinking, innovation, perseverance, and pride in work and struggle.<sup>22</sup> International nongovernmental organizations were kicked out of Eritrea and relations with international financial institutions were difficult.

While independence served as a core source of cohesion and support for the PFDJ's rule, there was growing disquiet among some top party leaders over the authoritarian tendencies of President Isaias Afwerki and those in his immediate circle. Human rights concerns and delays in implementing the constitution, scheduling elections, and convening a party congress raised questions about whether the powerful and disciplined insurgent army could transform itself into a democratic regime capable of tolerating dissent and engaging in meaningful consultation.<sup>23</sup>

## **THE BORDER WAR**

Questions about postwar governance, however, were shelved as war with Ethiopia erupted again. The warm relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia immediately after 1991 had degenerated by 1998. Disputes between Addis Ababa and Asmara arose over landlocked Ethiopia's access to Eritrean ports, questions of how the new Eritrean currency related to the existing Ethiopian currency, and disagreements over the precise location of their poorly demarcated border. Some tensions recalled the acrimonious relationship during the civil war. The classic imperatives of state- and nation-building drove both regimes to set forth unconditional goals and refuse compromise on the vital issues of territoriality, legitimacy, and identity. Reliance on solidarity between the two heads of state rather than a more institutionalized set of coordinating mechanisms left the interstate relationship personalized and fragile.<sup>24</sup>

In May 1998, Eritrean armed forces attacked the disputed border town of Badme. This use of military force quickly escalated into full-scale war.<sup>25</sup> Historical links and rivalries between the two populations, ruling parties, and leaders made the violence particularly bitter. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people were killed, 1 million were displaced, and a generation of development opportunities was squandered. After a period of military stalemate and unproductive negotiations, Ethiopia launched a major offensive in May 2000, broke through defenses, and forced Eritrea to pull its troops back to prewar positions. Following a June 2000 cease-fire agreement, the warring parties signed an internationally brokered agreement in Algiers in December 2000.<sup>26</sup>

The Algiers Agreement put in place a cease-fire, established a border zone to be patrolled by a UN peacekeeping mission, and created the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC). Under the agreement, the EEBC was tasked with demarcating a border based on colonial maps. Its judgment was final and binding. In April 2002, the EEBC issued its determination that the town of Badme was on Eritrea's side of the border. While not a strategically or economically important location, both regimes used Badme as the marker of whether it had "won" or "lost" the war, and hence whether the terrible sacrifices each had made in the conflict were justified or in vain.<sup>27</sup> The Ethiopian government initially objected to the decision, then accepted the agreement in principle while calling for more talks about implementation. Since then, the border conflict has been in an expensive stalemate, with regular eruptions of tension that create concerns about a return to war.

#### **AFTER THE BORDER WAR**

In March 2001, shortly after the Algiers Agreement was signed, a group of 15 senior Eritrean officials, several of whom had played major roles in the liberation struggle, signed a letter that criticized President Isaias and called for greater democracy. Among their demands was a congress of the ruling party, something that had last taken place in 1993. The letter was leaked. Eleven signatories and a number of their supporters were arrested in September 2001. They have been held incommunicado and without charge since then. The G-15 letter appealed to public opinion to remove Isaias, and it is unclear what the dissidents thought Isaias's reaction would be. Rather than stepping down or opening negotiations, the leader

responded as he had to threats during the armed struggle, seeking to eliminate the challenge.

The Eritrean government became highly repressive and isolationist. International human rights groups, monitors of religious persecution, and media watchdogs list Eritrea among the most repressive regimes in the world.<sup>28</sup> Today, a very small leadership circle around President Isaias dominates all aspects of political, economic, and social life. Power is concentrated in individuals, not institutions, making the regime unaccountable and capricious. Tronvoll and Mekonnen conclude that the regime's "nationalist ideology and populist appeal have been replaced by brute force, repression, and structural surveillance."<sup>29</sup>

Scholars have characterized Eritrea as a "garrison state," emphasizing the degree of militarization of all aspects of society and the overarching preoccupation with security.<sup>30</sup> Since the 1998–2000 border war, the regime has justified postponing planned moves toward constitutional rule and elections and the imposition of *de facto* martial law as necessary to protect Eritrea's independence. All citizens are required to perform national service, which often takes the form of lifelong military conscription. These harsh conditions and the absence of economic prospects have contributed to an extraordinary exodus of Eritreans seeking asylum and generating a refugee crisis in Europe.

Besides its border war with Ethiopia, Eritrea has had disputes with Yemen and Djibouti. International economic relations suffered after 2009 when the United Nations, with the support of the African Union and the United States, imposed sanctions against Eritrea. These sanctions arose from Eritrea's support for the Shabaab militant group in Somalia. Eritrea denied any involvement, but the United Nations imposed sanctions and began a contentious series of annual reviews. Asmara refused to cooperate with the United Nations in this process.

The 1998–2000 border war, the 2001 crackdown, and international sanctions led to the virtual collapse of the Eritrean economy. In 2008, for example, its economy contracted by nearly 10 percent, resulting in a shortage of basic commodities and necessitating rationing. These economic restrictions resulted in the development of a massive illicit economy that relied upon corruption at high levels of the security forces. Key income from mining, notably the Bisha gold mine, which began operation in 2011 with the support of investment from the Canadian firm Nevsun, holds

promise. In an effort to curb black market activity, the government removed all old currency from circulation and issued new notes in 2015.

The Eritrean diaspora has been a critical source of support for the EPLF regime. Eritreans in the diaspora effectively pay a 2 percent tax that subsidizes the Eritrean state. Many in the diaspora send money voluntarily, given their strong support for Eritrea's independence and the role the regime has played in defending Eritrea's sovereignty. Others, however, pay the tax in order to obtain visas and other consular services that allow them to visit relatives in Eritrea. More than just about any other state, the politics and economics of Eritrea are shaped in significant measure by Eritreans living abroad.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Eritrea's story reflects an extraordinary liberation struggle. The outcome of the war was determined by the 30 years of armed resistance by the Eritrean Liberation Front and later the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. These insurgent groups fought Emperor Haile Selassie and then the Derg regime until the Ethiopian army was exhausted and unable to fight. The liberation of Eritrea by military force was followed by an internationally monitored referendum in which 99 percent of Eritreans voted for independence. International recognition and support quickly followed.

The first eight years after victory represented a time of considerable hope and promise. The EPLF transformed itself into a political party, the PFDJ, and set up a consultative process to write Eritrea's first constitution. Asmara developed a friendly relationship with Addis Ababa and most Western powers. The commitment to autonomy and independence was powerful and resulted in some successes, as exemplified by the rebuilding of the railroad from Asmara to Massawa without international assistance. The war-torn country started the process of demobilizing its armed forces and rebuilding its shattered economy, with considerable support from the international community and the Eritrean diaspora.

In hindsight, the growing tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea are clear. However, at the time there was a sense that Isaias and Meles—two comrades in arms—would resolve their differences. In the end, a border skirmish in 1998 near Badme quickly escalated into full-scale war, leaving

Eritrea again highly militarized and now increasingly isolated. The non-implementation of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission demarcation created a very costly stalemate with Ethiopia. Repression increased, as seen in the 2001 arrests of senior leaders of the armed struggle who advocated for a political opening. In the 2010s, international sanctions, an economic crisis that required rationing of basic commodities, and a massive outflow of migrants left Eritrea as one of the poorest and most authoritarian states in the world.

National liberation movements such as the EPLF, with their legacies of intense socialization, solidarity, and vertical command structures, have produced some of the world's strongest authoritarian parties. During the civil war, rivals are defeated rather than tolerated, creating precedents and expectations that shape postwar politics. In Eritrea, the legacies of the victorious rebel movement created a ruling system without mechanisms to foster open debate within the leadership or consultations with the population. Dissidents became traitors and questioning leaders were seen as acting on behalf of the enemies of Eritrea's independence. In this way, the very strengths that fostered the EPLF's ability to win the war were hindrances to postwar accountability and democracy.

#### NOTES

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21. Kidane Mengisteab and Okbazghi Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, Economic and Foreign Policy Crisis in Post-Independence Eritrea* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005).

22. Firebrace and Holland, *Never Kneel Down*.

23. The challenge of transforming victorious insurgents into democratic ruling parties is not limited to Eritrea. For more see Terrence Lyons, "The Importance of Winning: Victorious Insurgent Groups and Authoritarian Politics," *Comparative Politics* 48, no. 2 (January 2016): 167-185.

24. Gilbert M. Khadiagala, "Reflection on the Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Conflict," *Fletcher Forum* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 39-56.

25. This was the judgment of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission established by the Algiers Peace Agreement.

26. Terrence Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa: U.S. Policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

27. Some mockingly likened the war to "two bald men fighting over a comb," but as a symbol of sacrifice Badme was very valuable.

28. The Committee to Protect Journalists labeled Eritrea "one of the world's worst jailers of journalists." Reporters without Borders ranked Eritrea 166 out of 168 countries in its 2006 Worldwide Press Freedom Index. Freedom House ranked the state as "not free" in its 2007 report. The U.S. Department of State's "International Religious Freedom Report 2007" says that the Eritrean Government "continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent evangelical groups, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church."

29. Kjetil Tronvoll and Daniel R. Mekonnen, *The African Garrison State: Human Rights and Political Development in Eritrea* (London: James Currey, 2014).

30. Tronvoll and Mekonnen, *The African Garrison State*.

31. Victoria Bernal, "Eritrea On-Line: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and the Public Sphere," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 660–675; Amanda Poole, "Ransoms, Remittances, and Refugees: The Gatekeeper State in Eritrea," *Africa Today* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 66–82.