



NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2027! We are Armen Bagdassarian and Sabeeh Mirza, and we are elated to serve as this year's Secretaries-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse high school Model United Nations conference. As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience.

Realism and Accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. We strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational Emphasis: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership and diplomacy that strive toward consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Research and a Dedicated Staff: Our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Our Directors spend over six months preparing Background Guides, in addition to Update Briefs written to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the topics to be discussed. Our staffers are trained rigorously to provide the best conference experience possible. Our daises provide thoughtful comments on submitted position papers. Our staff aims to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research, but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering Participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions. This is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. Delegates spend countless hours researching topics critical to the UN and broader international sphere.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Armen Bagdassarian
Secretary-General

Sabeeh Mirza
Secretary-General

Position Paper Requirements

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging. To assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). These guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a cabinet member, delegates must be able to articulate their policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the [Research Guide](#). To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages long** double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 26, 2027**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, their position paper must be submitted on or before **February 5, 2027**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the committee dais and returned before February 26. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Submission instructions for position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at nhsmun@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

When Eritrea declared its independence in 1993, a transitional government was formed. The Cabinet of Ministers was formed along with this government to serve as its main executive body. The Cabinet is composed of the sixteen ministers and is led by the president. The ministers are appointed by the president, who is appointed by the National Assembly.¹ The transitional government's main goal was to prepare Eritrea for democratic governance. To do so, it set out to write and implement a constitution, and hold elections by 1998.²

Between 1993 and 1997, for the planned duration of the transitional government, the Cabinet of Ministers was headed by Isaias Afwerki, who was elected president by the National Assembly in 1993. Almost every member of the Cabinet was a member of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) during the independence war. During this period the government oversaw the creation of a constitutional commission tasked with creating a draft constitution to be approved by the National Assembly and implemented by the Cabinet of Ministers.³ At the same time, a massive education campaign was launched with the objective of involving the public in the constitution making process. This campaign included radio broadcasts, plays, and seminars where people could discuss the commission's work. It was meant to introduce the concept of a constitution to a group of people that were largely unfamiliar with the term.⁴

The constitution was presented to, and ratified by the General Assembly in May of 1997. Elections were supposed to occur sometime in the same year, however as of 1998, no steps had been taken to implement the ratified constitution.⁵

Aside from the constitution, the transitional government has had to work through multiple threats of war with its neighbors. Between 1995 and 1996, territorial disputes with Yemen and Djibouti risked turning into wars. Relations with Yemen are on the mend, thanks to the external mediation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA).⁶ Relations with Djibouti however, remain tense, as the dispute is unresolved.⁷ Sudan and Eritrea shut their diplomatic relations due to the presence of hostile armed groups within each other's territory.⁸ More recently, a border disagreement with Ethiopia soured previously friendly relations, and by early 1998 war between the two countries is imminent.⁹

¹ Martin Plaut, "The Disappearance of the Eritrean Cabinet of Ministers?," *Martin Plaut*, October 10, 2024, <https://martinplaut.com/2024/10/01/the-disappearance-of-the-eritrean-cabinet-of-ministers/>.

² Simon M Weldehaimanot, "The Status and Fate of the Eritrean Constitution," *AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS LAW JOURNAL* 8, (2008): 112, <https://scielo.org.za/pdf/ahrlj/v8n1/07.pdf>.

³ Weldehaimanot, "The Status and Fate of the Eritrean Constitution," 112.

⁴ Richard A. Rosen, "Constitutional Process, Constitutionalism, and the Eritrean Experience," *North Carolina Journal of International Law* 24, no 2, (Winter 1999): 294, <https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1648&context=ncilj>.

⁵ Weldehaimanot, "The Status and Fate of the Eritrean Constitution," 122.

⁶ Plaut, "Yemen & Eritrea: Friends Once More?," 661.

⁷ Laken Kincaid, "The Impact of the Djibouti-Eritrea Conflict on Citizens," *The Borgen Project*, July 17, 2021, <https://borgenproject.org/the-djibouti-eritrea-conflict/>.

⁸ "Eritrean Border Conflicts (1998 - 2018)," The University of Edinburgh, accessed August 1, 2026, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/conflict/23/>.

⁹ Tseggai Isaac, "Eritrean-Ethiopian War," *EBSCO*, 2021, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/eritrean-ethiopian-war>.

Protecting Eritrea's Fragile Independence (1998)



Introduction

Less than five years after achieving internationally-recognized independence, Eritrea stands at a crossroads. After thirty years of war against Ethiopia, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front emerged victorious in 1991. Two years later, in 1993, the United Nations supervised a referendum that recognized Eritrea's independence.¹

However, the young state faced the challenge of transforming a liberation movement into a successful democratic government. While hopes were high that Eritrea could become a model of African post-colonial development, President Isaias Afwerki inherited a country devastated by decades of conflict. Eritrea faced unresolved territorial disputes, fragile regional relationships, economic hardships, and growing political tensions that threatened the country's future.

Situated along the western coast of the Red Sea, Eritrea's strategic importance has always exceeded its natural wealth. It is located on the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important maritime corridors, connecting Europe and Asia. As a result, for centuries, foreign powers such as the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, Italy, Britain, and Ethiopia, have competed for local influence in Eritrea.²

In 1890, Italian colonial rule began. The country built roads, railways, ports, and increased industrial development. However, this infrastructure was gradually dismantled by Britain who inherited Eritrea following Italy's defeat during World War II. Shortly after, in 1952, the United Nations established a federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Just ten years later, Ethiopia formally annexed Eritrea, igniting a thirty-year war for independence that would shape much of Eritrea's national identity and governmental institutions.³

Although the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) succeeded in the war for independence, peace did not bring prosperity to Eritrea. Infrastructure was destroyed, refugees required resettlement, and economic development

lagged. The ruling EPLF soon transformed into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), promising a constitutional, democratic government.⁴

In May of 1997, the National Assembly ratified a constitution that made sweeping guarantees regarding civil liberties and democratic elections. However, by January 1998, the constitution remains unimplemented. Elections also have yet to be held. The question of whether or not Eritrea's transition to constitutional rule will occur as promised remains.⁵

Externally, Eritrea's security is increasingly unstable. Relations with neighboring Sudan are strained due to mutual accusations of supporting armed rebel groups. Eritrea's diplomacy is also being tested by disputes with Djibouti and Yemen over maritime and territorial borders. The most pressing issue at hand, however, is the rapid deterioration of relations with Ethiopia. In the past, the ruling parties of both countries, the EPLF and Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), allied against Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's Derg regime. However, disagreements over the border, economic policy, and sovereignty have intensified since Eritrean independence. While the disputed Badme region is limited in economic and natural value, it has become a symbol of national pride and territorial integrity for both governments. Throughout the past year, military incidents along the frontier and failed diplomatic negotiations heightened tensions. Unresolved border disputes, competing political interests, and increased militarization of both Eritrea and Ethiopia mean that any local confrontation could escalate into a wider war.⁶

History and Description of the Issue

OVERVIEW

It is January 1, 1998, and the budding state of Eritrea looks to an uncertain future. Seven short years ago, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, led by Isaias Afwerki, replaced Ethiopia as the governing body of the country.⁷ In 1993, Eritrea became an independent state formally recognized by the United Nations.⁸ Initially a shining example of African democracy, Eritrea's colonial history has left the now-independent country with lingering issues.⁹

Although the region has relatively few natural resources compared with neighboring territories, its strategic location has long made it desirable to regional powers and foreign empires seeking control of Red Sea trade routes. Eritrea's modern history has been shaped by successive periods of Ottoman, Egyptian, Italian, British, Ethiopian, and independent Eritrean rule.¹⁰ Each has left lasting political, economic, and social legacies.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 dramatically increased the strategic importance of the Red Sea. As a result, Eritrea became a focal point of colonial interest, as well, due to its position along the western coast of the Red Sea in the Horn of Africa. During the European competition for influence in northeastern Africa, known as the Scramble for Africa, Italy established Eritrea as its first African colony in 1890. Over a 20 year period, they gradually expanded from the port of Assab and took over Red Sea port cities, before achieving complete control.

Under Italian rule, the colony experienced significant infrastructure development. However, these investments primarily benefited Italian colonial settlers. Indigenous Eritreans remained consistently politically marginalized. Notably, they faced discriminatory land and education policies, particularly during Benito Mussolini's Fascist

regime.¹¹

Italian rule ended in 1941 after British forces defeated Italy during the Second World War. Eritrea was then administered by the British Military Administration (BMA) until 1952. This period was characterized by economic decline, unemployment, and political unrest, as Britain dismantled much of the Italian colonial system while investing little into Eritrea's long-term development.

In 1952, following a United Nations resolution, Eritrea entered a federation with Ethiopia. As a result, Eritrea was given limited autonomy: Ethiopia managed its defense, foreign affairs, and finance. The federation quickly deteriorated as Ethiopia took apart Eritrea's independent institutions. For example, Eritrean symbols and languages were replaced with Ethiopian ones. In 1962, Ethiopia formally annexed Eritrea and made it one of its provinces. While this marked the end of the federation, it prompted widespread resistance.¹²

This event sparked the Eritrean War of Independence, which lasted for thirty years. The war unfolded amidst major political turmoil in Ethiopia. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) were the major independence movements. Supported by shifting regional and international alliances, the EPLF ultimately defeated Ethiopian forces in 1991. Following a United Nations-supervised referendum, Eritrea formally achieved independence.¹³

Following independence, Eritrea is now facing the difficult task of rebuilding a country devastated by decades of war.¹⁴ Eritrea is also confronting foreign policy challenges and territorial disputes. After Eritrea's most recent border dispute, tensions are threatening to boil over, and end the new country's brief period of peace.

WESTERN COLONIALISM

After periodic Ottoman and Egyptian occupation

in the early 19th century, Eritrean land along the coast of the Red Sea became greatly desired by European colonial powers. This was due to the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal.¹⁵ The Suez Canal separates Africa and Asia, and is used as a waterway for shipping. It is the fastest way between Asia and Europe by sea, and thus, one of the most used shipping lanes.¹⁶

Initially, during the “Scramble for Africa,” Eritrea was seen as less desirable due to its lack of natural resources. However, Eritrea still occupied important strategic positions along the Red Sea. Thus, in 1869, an Italian shipping company, the Rubattino Navigation Company, purchased stretches of Eritrean land near the port of Assab. Over the next two decades, Italy expanded its territory along the Red Sea, despite Ottoman and Ethiopian pushback. On January 1, 1890, these regional holdings were consolidated into the Kingdom of Italy’s “colonia primogenita,” or first-born colony.¹⁷ This was the starting point of the modern Italian colonial empire in Africa.

Italian occupation was supported by the British, who lacked the resources to add to its already expansive colonial empire. Additionally, Italy’s foothold in Eritrea would keep Britain’s rivals, Germany and France, from further expanding into

the Horn of Africa.¹⁸

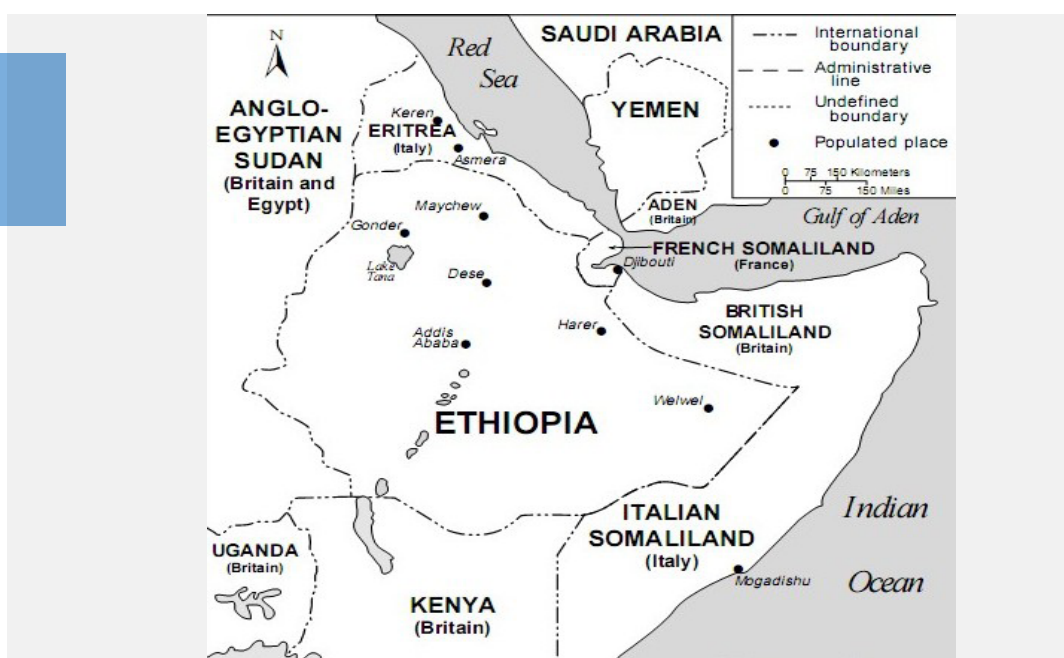
Despite establishing a colony, Italian influence in Eritrea was still opposed by Ethiopia. Emperor Menilek II of Ethiopia repelled multiple Italian invasion attempts, pushing them back into Eritrea after the 1896 Battle of Adwa. However, after the Kingdom of Italy promised Ethiopia financial and military support in exchange for Menilek’s recognition of the Italian Colony of Eritrea, a mutual peace agreement was made. This colony included the provinces of Bogos, Hamasien, Akkele Guzay, and Seraye.

Italy heavily invested into Eritrean infrastructure. During Italian colonial rule, extensive transport networks and numerous factories were constructed.¹⁹ Agriculture was also heavily developed under Italian oversight. Many native Eritreans were employed in these sectors; some also maintained their own plantations. However, land ownership was exclusive to Italians. In the 1920s and 30s, Eritrea saw an influx of Italian immigrants, growing to 10 percent of the colony’s population.²⁰

In 1922, Benito Mussolini established Fascist Italy after his successful coup. He aimed to make Italy a great colonial power, and secured alliances with

Colonial map of the Horn of Africa

Credit: Library of Congress



Yemen. Britain feared Italy's growing influence in the area. Consequently, Britain pushed for a more independent Eritrea.²¹ However, this did not happen. The 1930s saw the segregation of native African Eritreans and Italian settlers. Fascist Italy limited education for Indigenous Eritreans, as it feared educated citizens would fight back against their colonizers.²²

In 1935, Mussolini launched an invasion of Ethiopia from Italian Eritrea and Somalia. The Ethiopian forces were largely using outdated equipment. Most soldiers used traditional weapons, such as spears. The Italians deployed poison gas, causing significant deaths among the Ethiopian army. An estimated 15,000 to 50,000 Ethiopian casualties were caused by chemical weapons. Notably, these gases were prohibited under the Geneva protocol, an agreement signed by both Italy and Ethiopia.²³

On June 30, 1936, Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations to defend Ethiopia against Italy's attacks. While the League of Nations did impose sanctions against Italy, they could not stop Italy. Ethiopia was quickly annexed into Italian East Africa in 1936. This occupation continued into World War II, where Italy and Britain clashed in East Africa.²⁴ During the war, the Arbegnoch, or the 'Patriots,' were formed. The Arbegnoch were Ethiopian resistance fighters who rejected Italian occupation.²⁵ The Arbegnoch had fought during the initial invasion of Ethiopia against the Italians, and continued resisting during the occupation.²⁶

On February 19, 1937, two young Ethiopians threw seven hand grenades at Marshall Graziani, the colonial ruler on behalf of Italy. The attack killed three Italian officers, and wounded 52, including Graziani.²⁷ In response, Italians began killing Ethiopians on sight, burning houses and brutally clubbing children to death. 4,000 houses were burned by Italian officers.²⁸ The massacre continued for three days. According to estimates, up to 30,000 Ethiopians were killed.²⁹ This three-day event was later referred to as Yekatit 12.

Assisted by the Arbegnoch, the British defeated the Italians on March 27, 1941 at the Battle of Keren. Soon, the British drove the Italians out of the Horn of Africa altogether.³⁰ After the Italian defeat, the British Military Administration (BMA) was established to govern the territory, and would until 1952.

This period was marked by economic and social disorder. The BMA lacked manpower, hiring Italian administrators rather than Indigenous Eritreans. They aimed to dismantle previous Italian institutions so British rule could be fully implemented. However, its funds were stretched thin due to the ongoing war. Thus, Eritrea was seen by Britain as enemy territory to occupy until the war ended.

Britain was both unable and unwilling to invest in Eritrean infrastructure unlike Italy. They shut down arms factories due to decreased demand. As a result, both Indigenous and Eritrean workers lost their jobs, increasing unemployment significantly. In 1942, the establishment of American military bases provided some employment opportunities, but further drained Eritrean resources and increased the prices of goods. In a last-ditch effort to resolve the unemployment crisis, the BMA began deporting out-of-work non-Eritreans, mostly Sudanese and Yemeni people. Many Eritreans also immigrated to Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan in search of work during this time. Yet, living costs continued to increase regardless. This mass deportation and migration continued throughout 1943.

Eritrea's economic crisis led to social unrest, culminating in two strikes in 1949 by shipping and railway workers. *Shifita*, or armed bandits, grew in number as migrant workers and the unemployed joined their ranks. In some parts of Eritrea, the *shifita* replaced the BMA as the governing body of the region. The BMA's efforts to suppress the *shifita* were widespread, but ultimately ineffective.³¹

In 1947, a peace treaty between Britain and Italy was formed. Then, the United Nations deliberated

over the fate of Eritrea. A proposal by the United States saw Eritrea federated with Ethiopia in 1950. Eritrea was to retain some autonomy with an independent constitution and elected officials. Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia ratified the Eritrean constitution on August 11, 1952. He then ratified the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation on September 11, 1952. Four days later, the BMA withdrew from the region, officially ending European colonial rule in Eritrea.³²

INDEPENDENCE WAR WITH ETHIOPIA/ ETHIOPIAN RULE

The decision to create a federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea was shaped by many different interests. Internally, Muslim nationalists, with support from Arab states, sought independence, while unification was popular among the Tigrinya majority. Other Muslim and Christian factions instead called for a federation.

Externally, the UK sought to retain some land in the region, while the US wanted continued access to its military bases in Eritrea. Meanwhile, Italy wished to retake control of Eritrea with Soviet backing. However, the defeat of the Communist Party at the polls led the USSR to

withdraw its support. For Ethiopia, annexing Eritrea was particularly appealing because it would provide direct access to the Red Sea. Currently, they had to go through French-controlled Djibouti. Given these competing interests, the UN was called upon in 1948 to resolve the question of Eritrea's political status.³³

In 1950, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) decided that Eritrea would become an "autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia." Ethiopia was responsible for the defense, finance, and foreign affairs of the federation. They were also in charge of protecting the human rights of all citizens. Eritrea managed affairs like taxation and the judicial system. Eritreans were to have the right to participate in the federal government, treated as Ethiopian citizens.³⁴

The Ethiopian government was dissatisfied with this agreement. Selassie was quoted saying "[The federation] does not entirely satisfy the wishes of the vast majority of the Eritreans who seek union without condition, nor does it satisfy all the legitimate claims of Ethiopia."³⁵ The UN resolution stated that Eritrea could keep its national flag and languages, Tigrinya and Arabic. However, Ethiopia imposed its flag and Amharic as the national language.³⁶

EPLF fighters on their positions

Credit: Unknown author



Following a series of student protests during a strike in 1958, the government started shooting at protesters. The violence convinced some that peaceful resistance wasn't enough. This led to the creation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1960. The ELF was initially composed of mostly Muslims who viewed Eritrea as part of the Arab world. As such, it enjoyed support from the Arab states, who provided weapons and supplies.³⁷

In 1962, the Ethiopian assembly voted to dissolve the Eritrean parliament, and fully integrate Eritrea as the country's 14th province.³⁸ This decision led to many more people joining the ELF. Many of these new recruits were students who held more progressive stances than the conservative leadership of the ELF. Some were also Christians or Tigrinya nationalists, whose views clashed with the ELF's Pan-Arabist ideals. These new members gave rise to a new ideology within the ELF. These members didn't believe their faith should be a central part of the independence movement. Instead, they placed their Eritrean identity at its core. Several splinter groups formed, including many Communist ones. In 1973, they united around Isaias Afwerki and Romedan Mohammed Nur to form the Eritreans People's Liberation Front (EPLF).³⁹

Eritrean independence was not the only source of discontent in Ethiopia. In 1972, a severe drought caused a devastating famine, which Selassie's government failed to adequately address.⁴⁰ As conditions worsened, many soldiers began rebelling against their commanding officers, demanding greater water rations. News of the unrest quickly spread,

leading to the creation of a group of military rebels known as the Derg. The Derg selected representatives to negotiate with Selassie's government, and because it represented much of the military, it held a lot of bargaining power. This allowed the Derg to gain increasing influence within the government.

Slowly, the Derg gained more power within the country's institutions, even managing to replace the Prime Minister. In 1974, the Derg arrested Selassie and replaced him with General Aman Andom. After the coup, a period of internal fighting within the Derg ensued. Following this conflict, in 1977, Megistu Haile Mariam managed to take control of the junta after killing most of his opponents, including Andom.⁴¹

Throughout the first half of the 1970s, the ELF and the EPLF had been fighting to consolidate their power within Eritrea. In 1972, the ELF declared war on the defecting factions that preceded the EPLF. Nevertheless, the rise of the Derg forced both factions to sign a ceasefire, as the regime was receiving military equipment from the Soviet Union. This helped the Derg retake much of the territory that the EPLF and ELF had managed to capture.⁴² By 1978, the two organizations had been pushed back into the mountains to the northwest, close to the border with Sudan.

The ELF and EPLF subsequently agreed to cooperate against the Ethiopian army, but even with their combined forces, they were defeated and pushed further back. The EPLF responded by strengthening its control of its territories, while the ELF kept fighting the Eritrean forces.

Initially, Eritreans hoped that the new regime would recognize their call for independence, but it never did.

However, in 1980, the two groups started fighting each other again. The EPLF, which had been more successful against Ethiopian attacks, eventually forced the ELF into Sudan, where it finally disbanded.⁴³

The end of the ELF and the decision to retreat into its territories led to a stalemate between the EPLF and the Derg which lasted into the late 1980s. It was broken when the EPLF managed to capture the city of Afabet in 1988.⁴⁴ Several things happened during this time to make EPLF victory possible. The dissolution of the ELF led to many of its former members joining the EPLF, which almost tripled in size during this decade.⁴⁵ Additionally, the EPLF allied with the Tigrays People Liberation Front (TPLF), an Ethiopian group that fought to overthrow the Derg. Both movements shared a common ideology in Marxism, opposed by the Derg, and the TPLF promised to recognize Eritrean independence should they rise to power.⁴⁶ Lastly, the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev had cut off military aid to the Derg.

The military victory in Afabet led to a series of other victories. Within four days of taking Afabet, the EPLF captured Asmara and the TPLF took the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. The EPLF, led by Isaias Afwerki, established a provisional government and declared Eritrean independence in 1993. This decision was the result of a referendum, in which the Eritrean population overwhelmingly voted for independence. As promised by the TPLF, the new Ethiopian government recognized the Eritrean state, marking the end of the decade-long struggle for independence.⁴⁷

POST-WAR (1991-1998)

The new independent government faced several challenges after independence. There was very little manufacturing infrastructure, which made the economy reliant on imports.⁴⁸ 30 years of conflict created thousands of refugees who were looking to return home. Additionally, the political

institutions of an independent country needed to be built from the ground up.⁴⁹

The provisional government formed in 1991 was almost entirely managed by the EPLF. It controlled both the executive and legislative branches.⁵⁰ After the 1993 referendum, a cabinet of ministers and a national assembly were formed to fill these roles. Elections for the National Assembly were held in 1993, and Afwerki was chosen as president.⁵¹ Shortly after, the EPLF turned itself into a political party called the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).⁵²

In 1994, a constitutional commission was established, and the National Assembly appointed its members. Its goal was to create a democratic political system with an emphasis on eliminating tension between ethnic or religious identities.⁵³ Every ethnic group, major religion, and gender was represented in the commission. Notably, women held 47 percent of the seats. Some ex-ELF members had seats, though the majority of members were former EPLF fighters.⁵⁴

The National Assembly ratified the constitution in May 1997. The constitution appeared to establish Eritrea as a model of free and fair democracy within the region. It guaranteed rights regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender, defined the three branches of government, and created checks and balances to regulate government powers.⁵⁵ However, the constitution was never implemented. Although the 1998 war between Eritrea and Ethiopia further delayed its implementation, the government had not taken any steps toward putting the constitution into effect.⁵⁶ As of 2026, the constitution remains unimplemented.⁵⁷

Relations with Yemen had been tense since independence. Because the maritime border between the two countries had never been established, both countries claimed the Hanish islands, a group of islands near the Bab el-Mandeb strait and the entrance to the Red Sea.

Their location gives them strategic importance, as ships must pass through the strait to reach the Suez Canal. The Canal allows ships to travel between Europe and Asia without having to go around Africa, making it vital to global trade.

Furthermore, the archipelago contains oil and mineral deposits, adding to its strategic importance.⁵⁸ The Ottoman Empire controlled the islands from the 16th century until the end of World War I. Because both Eritrea and Yemen had been part of the Ottoman Empire at different points in history, each country claimed ownership of the islands.⁵⁹ Both also asserted that they had administered the islands after World War II. During Eritrea's independence war, the ELF and EPLF used the islands to launch attacks against Ethiopia. Britain maintained the islands' lighthouses until 1989, when Yemen took over these duties.⁶⁰

In September 1995, oil extraction projects from both countries overlapped with one another. Additionally, Yemen had allowed a German company to build a luxury hotel on the island of Greater Hanish.⁶¹ As a result, officials from Yemen and Eritrea met several times in the following months to settle the dispute. Yet, the countries could not reach an agreement.⁶² On December 15, fighting broke out, but two days later, a ceasefire was declared. However, fighting resumed on the 18th after both countries alleged the other violated the ceasefire.⁶³ The two countries remained at a standstill.

Ethiopia, Egypt and France tried to mediate a peaceful solution. Ethiopia's and Egypt's attempts failed, as the subject of troop withdrawal from the islands could not be resolved.⁶⁴ The French mediation led to the case being taken to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). Both sides ceased aggression, and freed any prisoners they held.

After two years, the PCA finally ruled that Eritrea would gain the Mohabbakhs, the Haycocks, and the South West Rocks, while Yemen would gain the Zubayr group and the Zuqar-Hanish.

However, Yemen would have to ensure the Eritrean fishermen that traditionally used the islands could still access them.⁶⁵ In 1999, the PCA officially established the maritime boundary between the two countries.⁶⁶

Tensions with Ethiopia also began to build in the latter half of the 90s. Some stemmed from their economic relation. Ethiopia lost access to the Red Sea after Eritrea gained independence, leaving them dependent. In 1997, Eritrea stopped using the Ethiopian *Birr*, and adopted its own currency, the *Nakfa*. This move made it more expensive for Ethiopia to use Eritrean ports. Both events left Ethiopian leadership frustrated.⁶⁷

The main source of tension, however, was the border, which remained undefined after Eritrea gained independence. Two different boundaries contributed to the dispute. The first one was established by a 1902 treaty between Italy and Ethiopia. The second was created after Ethiopia annexed Eritrea as a province in 1962. The discrepancy between these boundaries led to disputes over three areas: Badme, Tsorona-Zalambessa, and Bure.⁶⁸ In 1997, Eritrean and Ethiopian forces clashed around Badme. Attempts to resolve the dispute through peaceful negotiations failed, and the two countries went to war in 1998.⁶⁹

Current Status

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

In 1998, Eritrea's political system remains strictly dominated by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The Eritrean constitution was ratified some months earlier in May 1997, but has not been implemented yet.⁷⁰ The constitution was drafted over two years by the National Assembly, created in 1994. This took place shortly after the PFDJ, composed of core EPLF members, split off from the Eritrean government.⁷¹ Some members of the National Assembly were elected, while others were appointed by the PFDJ. The National

Assembly only convenes when called upon by the president.⁷²

The Eritrean Constitution outlines protections for human rights, gender equality, and democratic processes.⁷³ According to the Constitution, “The President shall be elected from amongst the members of the National Assembly by an absolute majority vote of its members.” It also specifies that if the presidency becomes vacant, “the Chairperson of the National Assembly shall assume the office of the President” for no more than 30 days.⁷⁴ Elections were planned for 1998 after the government failed to hold them in 1997.⁷⁵ Isaias Afwerki, the head of the PFDJ-controlled government, is allegedly a “transitional president” who would serve until a constitutional government was formed.

However, Eritrea is still governed through transitional institutions. Many of these were established shortly after independence in 1993. The PFDJ remains the country’s only legal political organization, while opposition parties are not openly permitted.⁷⁶

Additionally, the PFDJ re-introduced national unions. In theory, these were supposed to link Eritrean citizens to the government. In practice,

however, these were used by the PFDJ to implement their decisions. Communication between local communities and the government was largely one-directional. Additionally, communities lost local leaders to the PFDJ, who recruited them into government positions.⁷⁷

Even though the Eritrean Constitution dictates, “All persons have the right to assembly and to demonstrate peaceably together with others” and “Every citizen shall have the right to form organizations for political, social, economic and cultural ends,” the PFDJ opposes religiously or ethnically based political factions from gathering.⁷⁸ The Ministry of Internal Affairs requires citizens to obtain permits for public meetings and demonstrations.⁷⁹ Reportedly, no such permits have been denied. Notably, however, no political demonstrations occurred during this time.⁸⁰

All media outlets in Eritrea are government-controlled. Specifically, the PFDJ heavily restricts access to foreign journalism. Foreign and private media outlets are outlawed. While non-religious criticism of the government is allowed, such publications are few and far between. This may be due to the fact that the government prosecutes “whoever insults, abuses, defames,

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki

*Credit: Minister of Information
State of Eritrea*



or slanders the Government or one of the constituted legislative, executive, or judicial authorities.”⁸¹

Currently, the government maintains that national unity is more important than political plurality.⁸² As such, national security remains a major priority. Along with police forces, Eritrea maintains an army of 40,000 active personnel, supplemented by reserves and demobilized veterans.⁸³ This number is less than the initial 95,000 at the end of the war, following the government’s efforts to reduce the size of its military.⁸⁴

Other than the PFDJ, the armed forces are the most powerful entity in the country.⁸⁵ Since 1995, Eritrea requires all citizens aged 18-40 to perform six months of training and an additional 12 months of service in the military.⁸⁶ Eritrean armed forces have primarily been tasked with suppressing the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM).⁸⁷ This Sudan-based Islamist organization has previously carried out terrorist attacks in Western Eritrea.

The international human rights non-governmental organization (NGO), Amnesty International, raised concerns over political detentions in Eritrea. According to the Eritrean Penal Code, individuals can be detained for no longer than 30 days without charge. However, detainees have been held much longer in practice.⁸⁸ Since 1991, political prisoners, mostly those suspected to have ties to the EIJ or those opposing conscription, have been detained without charge or trial. Many of these arrests took place in western Eritrea or the southeastern Danakil

region.

An example of this is the group of 91 detainees that the Eritrean government released in 1995 after up to four years of imprisonment. They were suspected of collaborating with Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, leader of the Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie and ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991.⁸⁹

Former members of the Ethiopian security force, the Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council (an ELF breakaway faction), and Eritrean administrators have been detained, as well.⁹⁰ In September 1995, President Isaias Afwerki stated that they would soon be tried. Yet today, no hearing date has been set,

Prisoners have limited contact with the outside world, including friends and family. This may be in part due to Eritrea’s weak judicial system, which lacks resources and manpower.⁹¹ According to Amnesty International, up to a dozen detainees were reported to have “disappeared” between 1991 and 1992.⁹² On the other hand, the United States Department of State claims that, as of early 1997, there have been “no reports of politically motivated disappearances.”⁹³

The Eritrean economy has transitioned to a free-market economy from the former Ethiopian military dictatorship. Much of this stems from the agricultural sector, which employs over 70 percent of the Eritrean population. Many businesses that were state-owned under Ethiopian rule have also been privatized. As a member of the International Labour Organization

The main tensions exist between Eritrea’s religious institutions and the extremely nationalist government.

(ILO), Eritrea has drafted a labor code, but has yet to ratify it. Unions are not restricted, and the 129 unions of Eritrea are represented by the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers. It is independent of the government and the PFDJ. Despite this, the annual per capita income in 1996 Eritrea was equivalent to USD 150 at the time.⁹⁴

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL TENSIONS

The fundamental religious-cultural divide in Eritrea is between Muslims and Christians. Each makes up roughly half of the population, while a small minority practices traditional Indigenous religions. Christianity is the second-oldest religion after the Indigenous religions, and has Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant denominations. Although Islam has a similarly long history in the country, it has not achieved the same degree of state support as Christianity. This disparity is due in part to Eritrea's historical occupation by Christian Ethiopian and European powers.⁹⁵

There are nine recognized ethnic groups in Eritrea. The largest are the Tigrinya and Tigre people, which are majority Christian and Muslim, respectively.⁹⁶ The Afar, Hidarb, Nara, Saho, and Rashaida ethnic groups are mostly Muslim. The Bilen and Kunama people are split evenly between the two, though the latter also adhere to Indigenous faith systems.⁹⁷ There are nine national languages: the most common ones are Tigrinya, Tigre, and Arabic.⁹⁸

Despite ideological differences between the two major religions, there are no ongoing, widespread conflicts between the two. This, however, was not the case in the 1940s and 1950s, when there were a series of disagreements over Eritrean independence. Eritrean Christians advocated for unification with Christian Ethiopia, fearing that Middle Eastern Islamic countries would dominate. Eritrean Muslims believed the opposite.

Identity-based politics are frowned upon.⁹⁹ A 1995 proclamation formally separates religion from government, as well as recognizing and

regulating religious activities.¹⁰⁰ However, the Eritrean government sees faith as a threat to its power, and has persecuted various religious entities. This includes the minority of Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea, who face significant government persecution. Despite the Constitution claiming freedom of religion, Jehovah's Witnesses are denied trading licenses, passports, and the right to object to compulsory military service. As such, the only way they can leave the country is by land via Ethiopia.¹⁰¹

The PFDJ treats Eritrean Muslims with suspicion, arresting those who opposed state-appointed religious leaders. The Eritrean government also closed Islamic schools and institutions. Discrimination against Muslim communities in Eritrea, such as forced conscription of Muslim women, has only added to these tensions.¹⁰² This is because the PFDJ fears Eritrean Muslims associated with jihadist movements, particularly with the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM)¹⁰³

The EIJM was founded in 1980 through the merger of the National Eritrean Islamic Liberation Front, the Islamic Vanguard, the Organization of Eritrean Pioneer Muslims, and the Islamic Awakening.¹⁰⁴ They are also backed by Sudan's National Islamic Front.¹⁰⁵ The EIJM aims to overthrow the PFDJ and impose Islamic Sharia law.¹⁰⁶ The EIJM has historically launched terrorist attacks into western and northern Eritrea, and are known to set up mines along the western border of Eritrea. There is also increasing Sudanese military presence along the Eritrean-Sudanese border. Eritrea has responded by moving additional troops to the region.¹⁰⁷

By January 1, 1998, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia have become increasingly strained. This is largely due to disagreements over the border near Badme. While Badme itself holds limited economic and strategic value, it has become a symbol of national sovereignty. Even before 1991, tensions had been brewing in the area. The ELF operated out of Badme, though by 1981, the EPLF no longer claimed the territory.¹⁰⁸ The Ethiopian

government continued to administer the region. Still, because of its uncertain status, occasional skirmishes between local officials and militias have occurred. These disputes contributed to growing distrust between the two countries.

There has been little progress in negotiating the frontier. This, combined with rising nationalist sentiment and deteriorating relations between Eritrea's PFDJ and Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has made the situation increasingly unstable. Tensions skyrocketed during the summer of 1997 when Ethiopian forces entered and occupied what Eritrea considered its territory. Without a mutually agreed upon border, even a relatively minor local incident has the potential to escalate into a broader conflict, a risk that would soon become reality.¹⁰⁹

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Throughout the 1990s, Eritrea continued to develop relations with its neighbors. Its relationship with Ethiopia was initially friendly, as the EPLF and the TPLF had fought together to overthrow the Derg. This cooperation also contributed to a close relationship between Afwerki and the TPLF's leader Meles Zenawi,

who were friendly with each other prior to the 1998 war.¹¹⁰ Following Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia was the first country to recognize its statehood.¹¹¹ Additionally, the two countries signed an agreement allowing Ethiopia to freely use Eritrean ports.¹¹² Despite these close ties, relations began to deteriorate by 1997. During this time, there had been clashes between troops from both countries along the border, especially around the Badme region. Even as tensions increased, both countries continued working through the Eritrea-Ethiopia Joint Border Commission (EEJC) in early 1998 in an attempt to resolve the dispute diplomatically.¹¹³

While tensions with Ethiopia were increasing, Eritrea was making progress in rebuilding relations with other neighboring countries. This was particularly evident in its relationship with Yemen. After the 1995 conflict over the Hanish Islands, relations seemed to be improving between the two by 1998. The mutual willingness to submit their territorial dispute to the PCA opened a path toward reconciliation. By the end of the year, the PCA would release its first ruling which would be well received by both countries.¹¹⁴ After the ruling, Afwerki and Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Salih had talks to start rebuilding



UN Peacekeepers in the Ethiopia-Eritrea border

Credit: Dawit Rezene

their diplomatic and economic relations. Notably, they created a committee tasked with fostering cooperation between both countries.¹¹⁵ Eritrea soon withdrew its troops stationed on the islands.¹¹⁶ Additionally, flights between the two countries, which were suspended after 1995, were restored.¹¹⁷ These developments marked a significant improvement in Eritrea-Yemen relations.

Similarly to Ethiopia, Eritrea's relations with Sudan initially began in a friendly manner. During the Eritrean War of Independence, the Derg regime supported the Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA), while the EPLF occasionally fought alongside the SPLA. After the EPLF overthrew Mengistu in 1991, however, it no longer maintained the same close allyship with the SPLA. Despite this shift, Sudan remained supportive of the new Eritrean government. At the EPLF's request, Sudan helped take action against remaining ELF factions within its borders.¹¹⁸

By 1994, however, relations between Eritrea and Sudan had deteriorated immensely. Both countries accused the other of not doing enough to weaken armed groups operating along their borders. These accusations grew into claims that each government was actively supporting armed groups within the other country. Eritrea accused Sudan of supporting the EIJM, and cut off diplomatic relations in response.¹¹⁹ Sudan then began moving troops toward the border.¹²⁰ Although Sudan attempted to mediate between the two countries, nothing came of it. As of 1998, Eritrea and Sudan still have strained diplomatic relations.¹²¹

Eritrea's relations with Djibouti also began cordially, but became strained in 1996. Djibouti accused Eritrea of sending troops into its territory and bombing the town of Ras Doumeira. These tensions were rooted in a broader border dispute between the two countries. Djibouti and Eritrea had conflicting interpretations of two colonial-era agreements, with both countries claiming a small area of land along the Red Sea

coast.¹²² As a result, there were several clashes occurring along the border. Fortunately, the situation did not escalate into a full-blown war. As of 1998, relations remain tense.¹²³

Relations with the US were strong after Eritrea's independence. The US was one of the first countries to recognize Eritrea, and viewed the new country as a potential ally in the region. Notably, Bill Clinton referred to Afwerki as part of a new generation of leaders that could lead the continent into a new era. He called it the African Renaissance.¹²⁴ The US also saw Eritrea as a potential rival to Sudan. This stemmed from the Sudanese government supporting Iraq, a US adversary, during the First Gulf War.¹²⁵ Additionally, the US had a former military base in Asmara that it had abandoned after the Derg came to power in the 1970s. Regaining access to the base was attractive to the US because of its proximity to the Red Sea and the Middle East. These political and strategic interests led to significant US investment into Eritrea.¹²⁶

Bloc Analysis

By 1998, the PFDJ was the only political party in the country and closely tied to the new government's institutions.¹²⁷ The party faced no opposition in the 1993 National Assembly elections, and the majority of its seats are currently held by former EPLF members.¹²⁸ However, this does not mean that the PFDJ is ideologically homogeneous. Some members believe in a "Guided Democracy." Others prefer a liberal multiparty democracy.¹²⁹ These internal divisions, combined with the actions of foreign countries, mainly Eritrea's neighbors and the US, play a critical role in shaping the direction of the Eritrean government.

PROPONENTS OF "GUIDED DEMOCRACY"

Many members of Isaias' close circle advocate for a "Guided Democracy." Essentially, these members want the government to focus all of

its resources into Eritrea's economy, before establishing a typical democracy. They fear the decades of instability in the country would create opportunities for third parties to manipulate the people. As such, in this system, decisions are carried out independently by the executive. The general population is only involved in the implementation.¹³⁰ Members of this bloc include Yemane Gebremeskel, Osman Saleh, and Abraha Kassa.¹³¹

This bloc was inspired by the Singaporean government. When Singapore achieved its independence in 1965, it was in a similar position to Eritrea. It was a multiethnic and multireligious country with very little economic infrastructure.¹³² Like Eritrea, Singapore is also next to an important area for international trade: the Singapore Strait. The strait connects the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean and the rest of the world.¹³³ Leveraging this, by 1998, the single-party rule of the People's Action Party (PAP) turned Singapore into one of the most prosperous countries in Asia. The PAP achieved this by prioritizing economic growth over individual liberties. Notably, it has been accused of suppressing political dissent and the press. However, the PAP states it focuses on societal wellbeing over individual rights.¹³⁴

Regardless, members of this bloc wish to implement this model in Eritrea. In fact, many of these members have visited Singapore to study its government. They want to create a mixed economy open to private business, but with heavy central planning. For them, a multiparty system is not very important. Instead, they believe the government should act logically, regardless of ideology, in favor of national development.¹³⁵

PROPONENTS OF MULTIPARTY/LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The second bloc prioritizes a robust democracy with multiparty elections based on strict rule of law. For these bloc members, ensuring the individual liberties and rights of every citizen is

the most critical task of the new government.¹³⁶ This outlook is popular within the PFDJ, especially among those who were involved in drafting the 1997 Constitution. It is also popular among Eritreans living abroad.¹³⁷ Members of this bloc include Heile Woldense, Petros Solomon, Mahmoud Sherifo, and Ogbe Abraha.¹³⁸

For this bloc, democracy is the most important part of the EPLF's struggle for independence. Many members point out that even before independence, democratic governance was practiced to some extent in EPLF-controlled regions of Eritrea.¹³⁹ They support programs that aim to bring more people into the political process. One example is the Constitutional Commission's education campaign, which aimed both to introduce people to the concept of a constitution, and to encourage them to participate in writing it.¹⁴⁰ Naturally, implementing the 1997 Constitution and holding new elections are top priorities for this bloc. The bloc also supports a free-market economy, international trade and foreign investment.¹⁴¹ While the EPLF started as a communist organization, they abandoned the ideology in 1987, contributing to this shift toward a market-based economic system.¹⁴²

FOREIGN ACTORS

For a young, developing country like Eritrea, support from its neighbors and global superpowers is crucial. In a region plagued by instability, bad relations can easily bring national development to a halt. Conversely, friendly, cooperative relations may have implications for the entire continent. While each country has differing interests within Eritrea, most share a similar basic agenda. For example, avoiding armed conflict and fostering regional economic development are major priorities. This bloc includes people like Djibouti Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Moussa Chehem, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Resolving Eritrea's territorial disputes is crucial

for regional stability and an important topic for countries such as Djibouti and Sudan. The Eritrea-Yemeni case in the PCA is a good example to follow for resolving similar disputes.¹⁴³ Specifically, a well-planned agreement to submit to arbitration might help prevent further conflict in the future. These countries might also look for economic agreements aimed at leveraging their position within the Red Sea. Countries like Sudan and the US want to build new relations with the country mainly for security reasons. Groups like the SPLA that sometimes operate from Eritrea threaten Sudan. At the same time, Eritrea is strategically valuable to US interests in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.¹⁴⁴ Security cooperation with the Eritrean armed forces could therefore be attractive for these countries.

Committee Mission

The government in 1998 was a transitional government. Its main purpose was to oversee the establishment of a constitutional government. The constitution, ratified by the National Assembly in 1997, entrusted its implementation to the Cabinet.¹⁴⁵ One major priority of the Cabinet is organizing elections for the National Assembly. This is particularly important because elections were originally scheduled to take place in 1997, but were delayed due to the threat of war with Ethiopia.¹⁴⁶ Holding elections would mark the end of Eritrea's transition to democracy, and signal the start of the first elected government.

Another pressing issue that the Cabinet faces is preventing an all-out war with Ethiopia. As tensions built during the past year, both countries increased their military presence along the border region. For months, the Cabinet had been looking for a diplomatic solution to the dispute, working with multiple countries and international organizations to achieve this. The EEJC, the joint commission created specifically to address the dispute, has been holding discussions since November 1997 about defining the border.¹⁴⁷ Notably, the Cabinet expressed willingness to

submit the situation for international arbitration.¹⁴⁸ However, it has also stated that military action will be taken if Eritrea felt the need to defend itself.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, war with Ethiopia would be costly, especially for a country with such little infrastructure. Therefore, impeding the escalation of tensions is crucial for the development of Eritrea.

The Cabinet of Ministers, along with the President, is the head of the executive of the Eritrean government.¹⁵⁰ It is made up of over a dozen ministries in charge of areas such as defense, agriculture, and transportation. Consequently, it holds a lot of power within the country. Furthermore, representatives of surrounding countries and territories will be present in the committee. These representatives hold the ability to offer support or opposition from their country to propositions being discussed in committee. To fulfill its purpose, all members of the Cabinet will need to cooperate with one another to build strong, lasting solutions to the issues facing Eritrea that promote stability, development, and democracy. The solutions implemented by this committee will define Eritrea's trajectory for years to come.

Character Biographies

DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY OFFICE ABRAHA KASSA

Abraha Kassa Nemarian was born in 1953.¹⁵¹ During the Independence War, he was the head of security for the political wing of the EPLF. Since independence, he has been the head of the National Security Office (NSO), Eritrea's intelligence agency.¹⁵² Throughout his career, he has been a close personal ally of the president, using his position both before and after independence to help Afwerki consolidate his position and attack his opposition.¹⁵³

DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT YEMANE GEBREMESKEL

Yemane Gebremeskel is one of the most influential figures within the PFDJ. During the Independence War, he was the Secretary General of the EPLF. He held this position until the referendum in 1993. Since the formation of the provisional government, he has been the Director of the Office of the President and Afwerki's main political advisor.¹⁵⁴ He is a firm supporter of the Eritrean claim over the disputed regions around the border.¹⁵⁵

DJIBOUTI MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MOHAMED MOUSSA CHEHEM

Mohamed Moussa Chehem has been Foreign Minister of Djibouti since at least 1995. Throughout his career, he has proven to be a skilled diplomat. He has focused his efforts mainly on building stronger bonds between Djibouti, the Horn of Africa, and the rest of the world. Before being Foreign Minister, he was the Minister of Agriculture. While holding this position, he was one of the founders of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).¹⁵⁶ During the Somali Civil War, Moussa worked with IGAD on peacebuilding efforts in that country.¹⁵⁷ He has expressed his support for dialogue between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the issue of the border.¹⁵⁸

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AREFAINE BERHE

Arefaine Berhe has been the Minister of Agriculture since 1997.¹⁵⁹ During this time, he has worked to build the infrastructure needed to feed Eritrea's population. He has also worked to promote collaboration between Eritrea and international organizations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).¹⁶⁰

MINISTER OF DEFENSE SEBHAT EPHREM

Like most other members of the PFDJ, Sebat Ephrem is a veteran of the Independence War. He was one of the first people to join Afwerki in the EPLF. By 1976, he was fighting under the EPLF instead of the ELF.¹⁶¹ After independence, he was given the Ministry of Defence position due to his experience in the field. Throughout his career, he has remained close to the president.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION OSMAN SALEH

Osman Saleh Mohammed has served as the Eritrean Minister of Education since 1993.¹⁶² Prior to this, the EPLF operated schools, mostly with Ethiopian teachers. This was due to Eritrean schoolteachers joining the revolutionary effort.¹⁶³ After his appointment, he established a national school system.

MINISTER OF ENERGY AND MINES TESFAI GHEBRESELASSIE

Tesfai Ghebreselassie is Eritrea's Minister of Energy and Mines, and has occupied this role since 1993.¹⁶⁴ As such, he is responsible for negotiating with mining and mineral companies. He also manages Eritrea's energy sector, which has been significantly impacted by the loss of infrastructure during the war.¹⁶⁵

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAILE WOLDENSE

Haile Woldense, also known as Durue or Woldetense, was an important wartime figure in the EPLF. He met Eritrean president Isaias Afewerki at Ethiopia's Addis Ababa University. Both left school in 1966 to join the ELF's Eritrean Independence Movement. He later served on the EPLF's Central Committee, handling recruitment for the effort. In 1993, he was appointed as Minister of Finance and Development. In 1997, he became Eritrea's Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁶⁶

MINISTER OF HEALTH SALEH MEKI

Saleh Meki studied and later taught at the Asmara Nursing School. He also studied in the United States of America, at Minnesota University and a California State University. In the United States, he worked in marine research laboratories and spent over 15 years as a nurse anesthesiologist. He also was an EPLF representative in the United States for over a decade. There, he advocated for independence before returning to Eritrea in 1991.¹⁶⁷ He first served as Minister of Marine Resources from 1991 to 1997, and was then named Minister of Health.¹⁶⁸

MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE BERAKI GEBRESELASSIE

Beraki Gebreselassie has been a member of the EPLF-turned-PFDJ since 1972. After Eritrea achieved independence, he was named Eritrea's first Minister of Education. He was also one of the 150 members of the PFDJ's transitional National Assembly, tasked with establishing and implementing the newly-drafted Eritrean Constitution. He now serves as the Minister of Information and Culture.¹⁶⁹

MINISTER OF JUSTICE FOZIA HASHIM

Fozia Hashim, appointed Minister of Justice in 1993, fought for Eritrean independence in the 1980s.¹⁷⁰ As such, she is responsible for Eritrea's judicial system, and plays a large hand in political detainments. Prior to independence, only certain cities possessed legal institutions, as community courts were more common. She will also likely head Eritrea's efforts to overhaul and remodel their criminal justice system. She plans to train more legal professionals, among other improvements.¹⁷¹

MINISTER OF LABOR OGBE ABRAHA

Another supporter of the EPLF, Ogbe Abraha

joined the movement in 1972. Post-independence, he began his governmental career as Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Force. He then took up a position as Minister of Trade and Security. Now, he serves as Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.¹⁷² He is tasked with uniting the country's unratified labor code and the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers. This union is unaffiliated with neither PFDJ nor International Labor Organization, which Eritrea is a member of.¹⁷³

MINISTER OF LAND, WATER, AND ENVIRONMENT TESFAI GHIRMAZION

Tesfai Ghirmazion began his career in the post-independence PFDJ Cabinet as Minister of Agriculture of Eritrea. He held this position from 1993 to 1997. He was then succeeded by Arefaine Berhe, current Minister of Agriculture. In 1997, he was appointed Eritrea's first Minister of Land, Water, and Environment.¹⁷⁴

MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT MAHMOUD AHMED SHERIFO

Mahmoud Ahmed Sherifo was born in 1948. He is one of the first members of the EPLF. During the war, he held several leadership roles within the EPLF, including leading the information division, and the Department of Public Administration.¹⁷⁵ After independence, he served as Vice President between 1993 and 1994. Before becoming Minister of Local Government, he worked as the Foreign Minister.¹⁷⁶

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS ABRAHA ASFAHA

Abraha Asfaha has been Minister of Public Works since independence. During his career, he has focused on building infrastructure aimed at ensuring food independence for the country.¹⁷⁷ He has also worked on building stronger relations between Eritrea and countries such as China for the sake of infrastructure development.¹⁷⁸

MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS SALEH IDRIS KEKYA

Saleh Idris Kekya was born in 1950. Since 1993, he has held various offices in the newly independent government, including Ambassador to Sudan and Member of the Central Council of the PFDJ.¹⁷⁹ In 1998, he is the Minister of Transportation and Communications.¹⁸⁰

NORTH YEMEN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ABDUL AL-KARIM AL-IRYANI

Abdul al-Karim al-Iryani was born in 1934. He joined Yemeni politics in 1974, after returning from his studies in the United States. He held several ministries in the Yemen Arab Republic and Unified Yemen. Between 1980 and 1983, he was the Prime Minister of the Yemen Arab Republic. In the beginning of 1998, he was the Yemeni Foreign Minister, and, later that year, he would become Prime Minister once again.¹⁸¹

SECRETARY OF THE PFDJ ALAMIN MOHAMMED-SEID

Alamin Mohammed-Seid was born in 1947. He joined the ELF at 19, and was one of the founding members of the EPLF. Within the EPLF, he was head of areas like foreign relations and information. He has been the Secretary of the PFDJ since it was formed in 1994.¹⁸²

SOMALILAND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MOHAMOUD SALAH NUR

Mohamoud Salah Nur, also known as Fagadhe, was born around the 1930s. During the Socialist government of Mohamed Siyaad Barre, he worked as a Junior Minister of Information. In the 1980s, he joined a separatist guerilla in Northern Somalia. After the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime, he became a part of the newly formed government of Somaliland. His role in the establishment of Somaliland has made him a national hero. In 1998, he was appointed Foreign Minister.¹⁸³

SUDAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ALI OSMAN MOHAMMED TAHA

Ali Osman Mohammed Taha was born in 1944 in Khartoum, Sudan. He studied law at the University of Khartoum. There, he joined the National Islamic Front (NIF), an Islamic Fundamentalist Party. Between 1986 and 1989, he held a seat in Parliament representing the NIF.¹⁸⁴ In 1989, he supported a military coup that placed Omar al Bashir in power. Within the Bashir regime, he held the Ministries of Social Planning, Finance, and Foreign Affairs, which he still holds in 1998.¹⁸⁵

US SECRETARY OF STATE MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

Madeleine Albright was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937. Her family moved to the United States in 1948, escaping a communist coup.¹⁸⁶ By 1998, Albright was an experienced government worker. After finishing her education in 1976, she worked as chief legislative advisor to Democratic Senator Edmund Muskie. In 1978, she was a member of the National Security Council under President Jimmy Carter. Between 1993 and 1996, she was the US Ambassador to the UN, after which she became the first female Secretary of State during Bill Clinton's administration.¹⁸⁷

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

TOPIC A

- 1** What role should civil society and ex-ELF members have in the new constitutional government?
- 2** What should Eritrea prioritize when approaching its territorial disputes with its neighbors? Historical and ethnic ties, diplomacy, strategic importance, and resources?
- 3** What should the implementation of the 1997 constitution look like? What actions must be taken first? How will elections work in the new government?
- 4** How should the economy be structured to promote development and wellbeing after decades of conflict? What role, if any, could foreign actors play?
- 5** How can the government work to help resettle the refugees created by the war? How can it help reintroduce EPLF veterans into civil society?

Important Documents

TOPIC A

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