

*Eritrea in Perspective*  
An Orientation Guide



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# Chapter 1 Geography

## Introduction

Eritrea occupies a strategic location on the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping routes.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars believe that the Eritrean region was once part of a larger area that ancient Egyptians referred to as the "Land of Punt." This legendary trading center was described in Egyptian lore as a source of precious metals and exotic goods and animals.<sup>2</sup> For much of its known history, Eritrea formed a portion of the Ethiopian Empire. The Italians formally applied the name "Eritrea" when they colonized it in the late 19th century, and based the name on a modified version of the Latin name for the Red Sea, *Mare Erythraeum*.<sup>3</sup> The country's modern borders are largely a legacy of the colonial era, although its southern border with Ethiopia remains under dispute.<sup>4, 5</sup>



© Hans van der Splinter & Mebrat Tzehaie  
Port in Massawa, 1996

## Area

Eritrea is situated on the northern edge of the Horn of Africa, in the northeastern region of the continent. The country possesses a lengthy eastern coastline of 1,151 km (715 mi) on the Red Sea, and it shares land borders with three nations: Sudan to the north and west, Ethiopia to the south, and Djibouti to the southeast. The Dahlak Islands off the central coast are recognized as Eritrean territory. Although mostly unpopulated, the archipelago of some 300 islands provides an additional 1,083 km (673 mi) of coastline. Eritrea's total area is approximately 117,600 sq km (45,405 sq mi), making it slightly larger than the state of Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
Eritrean desert

<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>2</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "The Land of Punt," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 296.

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: Introduction," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>4</sup> BBC News, "Border a Geographer's Nightmare," 12 May 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/396571.stm>

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Transnational Issues," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>6</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

## Climate

Eritrea's climate is primarily a function of altitude. In the highlands, the temperature is moderate year-round. The capital Asmara, at 2,347 m (7,700 ft), has an annual average temperature of 17°C (62°F) and an annual average rainfall of 508 mm (20 in). But the coastal city of Massawa averages 30°C (86°F) with occasional highs of 50°C (122°F), and 205 mm (8 in) of precipitation each year. Some areas of the coastal plains are even drier, receiving less than 51 mm (2 in) per year. On the other side of the highlands, the western lowlands generally receive less than 400 mm (16 in) of annual precipitation. Eritreans refer to the midyear rains in the highlands and lowlands as *kiremti*, "big rains" (June through September), and the unpredictable rains in the coastal areas as *belg*, "little rains" (October through March).<sup>7</sup> The inland plateau, with its moderate temperatures and rainfall, is the breadbasket of Eritrea. Its climate supports the limited growth of vegetables and fruit, as well as sheep, goat, and camel herding. Nonetheless, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has reported that 80% of Eritrea does not receive enough rainfall to support agriculture.

## Geographic Divisions

Mainland Eritrea can be divided into three general geographic regions: the coastal plains, the central highlands, and the western lowlands.<sup>8</sup>

### *Coastal Plains*

Bordering the Red Sea, the coastal plains stretch from the country's northernmost point near Sudan to its southeastern border with Djibouti. This strip of hot, dry land is generally narrow in the north, where it measures between 16 and 80 km (10 and 50 mi) wide. It is bounded on the west by a prominent ridge that forms the eastern limits of the central highlands.<sup>9</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
Eritrean coastal plain

In the south, near the central coast, the strip widens to encompass the Danakil Plain, a low-lying expanse that extends from northern Ethiopia. Once the site of an inland sea, this plain includes the northernmost portion of the Danakil Depression, the country's lowest point of elevation (75 m or 246 ft below sea level), near Kulul.<sup>10, 11</sup> The depression, most of which lies in Ethiopia, is one of the hottest places on earth; daytime highs of 50°C (122°F) are not uncommon.

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<sup>7</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzehaie, "Climate," Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-climate.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Roseline NgCheong-Lum, "Geography: Three Regions," in *Eritrea* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2001), 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The Land: Relief," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Danakil Plain," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/157518/Denakil-Plain>

<sup>11</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 14 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

In the far southeast, a volcanic range (known by some as the Danakil Alps) runs parallel to the coast in the inland region along the Ethiopian border; this range marks the northern edge of the Danakil Depression in northern Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup> The coastal region is sandy and barren in many areas, with limited grass and shrub growth in others. Overall, its harsh conditions account for the region's low population density.

### *Central Highlands*

This region consists of a high, southcentral plateau that branches into mountain ranges in the north. As a whole, the highlands region is an extension of the Ethiopian Plateau, and it narrows as it stretches south to north, ultimately reaching the Sudanese border. Much of the southcentral plateau lies at a minimum of 2,000 m (6,500 ft), and several of its steep ranges reach higher elevations. Emba Soira, the country's highest point (3,018 m or 9,902 ft), is in the southeastern portion of the highlands region. In the north, a few peaks reach above 2,500 m (8,200 ft). The plateau is intersected by gorges and river valleys, and on its eastern edge, it descends into a striking cliff along the coastal plains. On its west, it slopes downward into rugged hill country.<sup>13</sup> The region is cooler, wetter, and more fertile than the rest of the country; it is home to up to half the population.<sup>14</sup>



© Alfonso / wikimedia.com  
Eritrean central highlands

### *Western Lowlands*

With an average elevation of 457 m (1,500 ft), this region's terrain comprises ragged hills and rolling plains that slope down from the central highlands toward the western border with Sudan. Endowed with poorer soils than the highlands, the lowlands are largely covered in savanna, or dry grasslands with scattered shrubs and woodland areas.<sup>15</sup> Rocky outcroppings occur in many areas, and some expanses are barren.

### *Major Rivers*

Eritrea has four major rivers, all of which flow into Sudan. The Setit River, also known as the Tekezé, is the only river that flows year-round; the others are seasonal and dependent upon rains. The Setit originates in Ethiopia and flows along the western portion of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border before crossing into Sudan. It is not navigable. The Anseba and Barka rivers arise in



© Charles Roffey  
Dry river bed of the Gash Barka

<sup>12</sup> MSN Encarta Online Encyclopedia, "Denakil Desert," 2008, [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761585164/denakil\\_desert.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761585164/denakil_desert.html)

<sup>13</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The Land: Relief," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The Land: Settlement Patterns," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The Land: Relief," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

the central plateau during the rainy season and flow generally northwest. They merge near Sala and flow into Sudan as the Barka, which ultimately drains into marshes near, but short of, the Red Sea. The Gash River, the upper portion of which is known as the Mareb, flows south from the central plateau and then west along the central Eritrean-Ethiopian border. When active, it flows through the western lowlands before crossing into Sudan. The highlands also produce seasonal streams, some of which flow east toward the coast.<sup>16</sup>

## Major Cities

### *Asmara*

Asmara, the capital, is situated at a high altitude (2,347 m or 7,700 ft) in the northeastern region of the highland plateau. It has an estimated population of 435,000 and is the largest of the six major Eritrean cities.<sup>17</sup> Asmara is a picturesque, clean, and generally safe city with palm-lined streets. Well defended during the conflict with Ethiopia, the city retains its historic architecture, much of which demonstrates Italian influence.<sup>18</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
View of Asmara

Its name is taken from the Tigrinya language, *arbaete asmara*, which means “four villages united.” The city’s population is divided equally among Christians and Muslims.<sup>19</sup> Its port and location along the Red Sea make the city a major transportation junction. Because of Asmara’s altitude and proximity to international conflict zones, the United States operated a telecommunications base there from 1942 to 1977; the base was important for supporting operations in the Middle East and neighboring Somalia.<sup>20, 21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea: The Land: Drainage,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>17</sup> *Bureau of African Affairs*, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Roseline NgCheong-Lum, “Geography: Asmara,” in *Eritrea* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2001), 16–17.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Asmara,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/38760/Asmara>

<sup>20</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Asmara,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/38760/Asmara>

<sup>21</sup> Herman J. Cohen, “Somalia and the United States: A Long and Troubled History,” AllAfrica.com, 21 January 2002, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200201210455.html>

### *Massawa*

On the northcentral coast, Massawa is the country's primary seaport and the site of the largest natural deepwater port on the Red Sea. It has an estimated population of 25,000 people, most of whom are Muslim.<sup>22</sup> The city comprises three districts: mainland Massawa, peninsular Tualud, and the historic Island of Batse. The island—with its ancient squares, Ottoman houses, and religious buildings—was an important trade city in antiquity, and would likely be a major tourist destination if the country's political and economic situation were to stabilize. As a whole, the city suffered extensive damage during Eritrea's war for independence.<sup>23</sup> The city's strategic significance is illustrated by the fact that, at the onset of World War II, Hitler launched the Nazi invasion of North Africa through the port at Massawa.<sup>24, 25</sup>

### *Nakfa*

Nakfa (Nacfa) is a revered city for Eritreans because it was the birthplace of the Eritrean independence movement. (Eritreans named their currency, the Nakfa, after this center of nationalistic sentiment.) The city is situated at an altitude of 1,676 m (5,000 ft) in the northeastern highlands and has a population of approximately 25,000. As the stronghold of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the city suffered extensive bombing during the war.<sup>26</sup>

### *Keren*

At an elevation of 1,372 m (4,500 ft), the city of Keren (Cheren) is northwest of Asmara in the central highlands. It is the roof garden of Eritrea. The city is a major agricultural and dairy center for the region, and has a population of approximately 75,000.<sup>27</sup> A variety of fruits and vegetables are produced on its numerous small farms, and it is especially known for its potent chili peppers. Keren's dairy herds produce milk, butter, and cheese. The city's population is mostly Muslim.<sup>28</sup> The British defeated the Italian army during the Battle of Keren in 1941.<sup>29</sup>



© Carsten ten Brink  
View of Keren

<sup>22</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>23</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Massawa," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/368514/Massawa>

<sup>24</sup> 4th USASAFS Kagnev Station, "Chapter Three: U.S. Naval Repair Base, Massawa," n.d., <http://www.kagnevstation.com/history/chapter3/>

<sup>25</sup> Previously, in their 1935–36 attempt to colonize Ethiopia, the Italians had used Eritrea as a base from which to launch its attacks. See Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, 2, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzehaie, "Nacfa (Nakfa) Eritrea," Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-nacfa.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzehaie, "Keren Eritrea," Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-keren.htm>

### Agordat

Agordat (Akordat) is on the Barka River in the western lowlands, and known for its fruit and nut production. Many of the 25,000 inhabitants of this area own or work on banana plantations, which can be seen on the hills overlooking the river. Doum palms, also known as Akat trees, grow along the river's banks. They bear an oval, red-orange fruit that is sometimes called gingerbread fruit.<sup>30</sup> The city is the site of the second-largest mosque in Eritrea, which was built by the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in 1963. He also commissioned a Catholic church for the city.<sup>31</sup>

### Assab

On the far southeastern coast, Assab is the secondary port city in Eritrea. Once the primary port of Ethiopia, it was purchased in 1869 by the Rubattino Shipping Company and later secured as a colony by the Italian government. The port's strategic location near the Straits of Bab al-Mendeb made it an attractive site to the Italians, who hoped to develop it as a center for trade between Ethiopia and Arabia.<sup>32</sup>

Now an industrial port city, Assab consists of three distinct sections: the shoreline district of Assab Seghir (small Assab), the central district of Assab Kebir (big Assab), and Campo Sudan, an older district west of the city center.<sup>33</sup> It has an estimated population of 28,000.<sup>34</sup>

### Environmental Issues

Approximately 80% of the Eritrean population depends on agriculture and animal husbandry.<sup>35</sup> But less than 5% of the land is arable because most regions suffer from poor soils and hot, arid conditions.<sup>36, 37</sup> The widespread demand for farmland, pasture, firewood, and fodder has stretched the country's limited resources, especially as the population has grown. Over time, overuse of cultivable areas has led to degradation,



© Charles Roffey  
Countryside near Gash Barka

<sup>29</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, 2, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Doum Nut," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/170265/doum-nut>

<sup>31</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzahaie, "Agordat (Akordat)," 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-agordat.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Bab al-Mendeb, "gate of tears," is the Arabic name for the narrow mouth of the Red Sea, for its high ambient temperatures and humidity.

<sup>33</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzahaie, "Assab—Main Port of Eritrea," Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-assab.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>35</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>36</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>37</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, 5 <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

particularly in the northern and central highlands where the majority of Eritreans live. Furthermore, responsible land management practices have not always been in place or enforced, and several regions suffered significant damage during the war for independence. Subsequently, these forces have placed serious pressures on Eritrea's fragile environment.<sup>38</sup>

The clearing of forests for timber, firewood, fodder, and farmland has resulted in widespread deforestation. Eritrea has lost many of its native and economically viable woodlands, leaving limited areas of natural forest intact.<sup>39</sup> In many highland areas, cultivation occurs on steep slopes with shallow soils.<sup>40</sup> This practice, combined with deforestation, has contributed to soil erosion, a process that has long afflicted the region. Because rainfall is often highly variable, torrential rains can wash away soils while droughts contribute to further desertification. Unsustainable farming and overgrazing practices also have led to erosion and desertification. All these factors have contributed to the decline of regional biodiversity, and a number of wildlife species are either vulnerable or endangered.<sup>41</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
Dry river bed of the Gash Barka

Since independence, the Eritrean government has made efforts to improve environmental policy. Most notably, it has worked to reforest exposed areas, combat desertification, and develop rainwater catchment schemes. Individual communities also have taken steps to conserve their limited local resources, such as designating a local tract of land as a preserve. In addition, although the war resulted in destruction and the proliferation of land mines, it had a few positive effects on the environment. Because livestock populations were significantly reduced during the conflict, Eritrean pasturelands were relieved of some pressure, allowing for regeneration. Other areas also experienced renewed vegetation as a result of the displacement of local populations.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Development Program, "Eritrea: Background," n.d.,

<http://www.er.undp.org/energy&environment/slm.html>

<sup>39</sup> Pauline Boerma, "Assessing Forest Cover Change in Eritrea: A Historical Perspective," *Mountain Research and Development* 26, no. 1 (February 2006),

<http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/all/modules/pubdclnt/pubdclnt.php?file=http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/default/files/pub/5778.pdf&nid=18671>

<sup>40</sup> Pauline Boerma, "Assessing Forest Cover Change in Eritrea: A Historical Perspective," *Mountain Research and Development* 26, no. 1 (February 2006),

<http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/all/modules/pubdclnt/pubdclnt.php?file=http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/default/files/pub/5778.pdf&nid=18671>

<sup>41</sup> Animal Info, "Eritrea," 17 April 2006, <http://www.animalinfo.org/country/eritrea.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Pauline Boerma, "Assessing Forest Cover Change in Eritrea: A Historical Perspective," *Mountain Research and Development* 26, no. 1 (February 2006),

<http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/all/modules/pubdclnt/pubdclnt.php?file=http://www.mtnforum.org/sites/default/files/pub/5778.pdf&nid=18671>

## Natural Hazards

Drought and locust swarms are the most common natural hazards in Eritrea, and both can have devastating effects on crop production and the welfare of local communities. The country is particularly prone to drought, because regional rainfall is unreliable and the climate is generally hot and dry, especially at lower elevations.

Drought has been particularly severe over the last two decades, affecting more than 1 million people during each incident (1993, 1999, and 2009).

Droughts also have caused serious food shortages and forced the country to rely on food imports and foreign aid.<sup>43, 44</sup>



© Carsten ten Brink  
Grasshopper

Also potentially disastrous are the periodic locust hatches that usually follow a season of strong rains.<sup>45</sup> The dark clouds of plant-eating insects devour crops and trees while they migrate east with the westerly winds. Their path ultimately takes them across the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Massive land-based and airborne spraying have often failed to curb the regional infestations. As of August 2011, low numbers of adult desert locusts have been reported in neighboring Mauritania, Niger, and Sudan, and are believed to be present in the western lowlands of Eritrea.<sup>46</sup>

Although earthquakes are rare in Eritrea, in June 2011 a series of earthquakes caused the dormant Nabro volcano on the Eritrea-Ethiopia border to erupt.<sup>47</sup> The volcano, which sent ash clouds 13 km (8 mi) into the sky, led to the cancellation of regional flights and the pollution of some springs and streams in Eritrea.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> EM-DAT, "Eritrea Country Profile," 25 July 2011, <http://www.emdat.be/result-country-profile>

<sup>44</sup> IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Eritrea: Drought a Major Cause of Hardship," 27 July 2005, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=55606>

<sup>45</sup> FAO Newsroom, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, "Desert Locust Outbreak in Eritrea," 23 February 2007, <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2007/1000503/index.html>

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Locust Watch, "Desert Locust Situation Update," 3 August 2011, <http://www.fao.org/ag/locusts/en/info/info/index.html>

<sup>47</sup> Aaron Maasho, "Eritrean Volcano still Erupting, some Flights Cancelled," Reuters, 14 June 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/14/us-eritrea-volcano-idUSTRE75D3VL20110614>

<sup>48</sup> *BBC News*, "Eritrean Volcano Ash Hits Ethiopia Villagers," 20 June 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13847054>

## Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Emba Soira is Eritrea's highest point.

**True**

In the southeastern portion of the highlands region, Emba Soira is the country's highest peak at 3,018 m (9,902 ft).

2. The city of Massawa is the site of the largest natural deepwater port on the Red Sea.

**True**

The site of the largest natural deepwater port on the Red Sea, Massawa is Eritrea's primary seaport.

3. Eritrea has four major rivers, all of which flow into the Red Sea.

**False**

Eritrea's four main rivers flow into Sudan. Only one river flows year-round; the others are seasonal and dependent upon rains.

4. Periodic gypsy moth infestations are disastrous to Eritrean crops.

**False**

Occasional heavy rains trigger locust hatches that severely damage Eritrean crops.

5. The city of Keren (*Cheren*) is considered the "roof garden" of Eritrea.

**True**

Located northwest of Asmara, the city of Keren is the roof garden of Eritrea for its hospitable climate and abundance of small farms that produce fruit, vegetables, and dairy products.

## Chapter 2 History

### Introduction

The history of the Eritrean region is closely linked to that of Ethiopia, the country's southern neighbor and former sovereign. Eritrea's location on the Red Sea, which narrowly separates the African and Asian continents south of Egypt, played a major role in its historical development. It was susceptible to influxes of people and ideas from North Africa (mainly Egypt), the Middle East, and Europe. The country's mixed population of Christians and Muslims is a legacy of such movements. The religions reached the Eritrean region shortly after they developed: Christianity came in the early second century C.E. and Islam in the early seventh century. Although the region was often incorporated into larger regional kingdoms or empires, its coastal areas were frequently controlled or occupied by foreign entities. Through contact or conquest, the region absorbed Greek, Arab, Ottoman, Italian, British, and other influences over the centuries.



© H.B. Scammell/ wikipedia.org  
View of Massawa, 1890

As an independent, self-governed nation, Eritrea is relatively young. After a prolonged conflict with Ethiopia, its armed forces won control of the area in 1991, and the country was formally declared an independent nation on 24 May 1993. Its brief history as an autonomous nation has been marred by territorial disputes, war, drought, and economic stagnation. After the independent era's hopeful and auspicious start, the government, led by President Isaias Afwerki, has become increasingly isolated and authoritarian. As a result, the government has a tight control over the economy and has placed severe restrictions on civil liberties.<sup>49</sup>

### The Land of Punt

The first mention of "Punt" dates to the fifth dynasty of ancient Egypt (c. 2400 B.C.E.). Some scholars believe that the name referred to the modern Eritrea region. Relief paintings at that time show ostriches, antelopes, and copper-skinned slaves bearing ivory, ebony, and coffers of gold and frankincense from *Ta Netjer* (Punt), or "god's land." Nobles from Punt visited courts of the pharaohs. Subsequent Egyptian pharaohs, such as Mentuhotep of the 11th dynasty (c. 1980 B.C.E.) and Ramses III of the 20th dynasty (1260 B.C.E.), visited Punt. They traveled by two well-known routes. The first was an overland route that followed the Nile River to Sudan and then tracked further south to Punt. The second route was by the Red Sea, sailing south from Egypt to modern Massawa. Near the end of the final Egyptian



© George Rawlinson  
Queen of Punt, 1886

<sup>49</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, "Eritrea," in *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154345.htm>

kingdom (the 31st dynasty), sailors and traders of the Greek-Egyptian Ptolemaic Empire (330 B.C.E. to 50 C.E.) continued to trade with Punt.<sup>50</sup>

### Aksumite Civilization

Sometime during the first century C.E., the Kingdom of Aksum (Axum) emerged in the south of present-day Eritrea. Over the next three centuries, its holdings expanded to cover southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, large parts of northern Somalia, and coastal areas of southern Arabia and Yemen. Aksum's language was Ge'ez (Gi'iz), a Semitic tongue, but Greek was an influential second language as well as the language of commerce in the eastern Mediterranean. Aksum was an important link in regional trade networks, exporting gold, ivory, frankincense, and obsidian to the north and as far east as India. Its kings, who built impressive stone palaces and temples, carried the title *Negusa Nagast*, or "King of Kings."



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Obelisk at Aksum

Close ties with the Greek world brought Christianity to the inhabitants of Aksum in the early second century C.E. During this time, the Greeks gave the nearby Meroë people the name *Aithiopiai*, or "burnt faces." This name was later applied to the Ethiopian region and its people. By 325 C.E., the Aksum King Ezana had converted to Christianity and made it the state religion. This act laid the foundations for the Ethiopian Coptic (or Orthodox) Church.<sup>51</sup>

In the late sixth century, Persia's expanding Sassanid Empire forced the Aksumites out of Arabia and besieged many of the Red Sea ports. Aksum's growth ceased at this point. Yet Aksum's close ties to the Arabian leaders allowed for a sizeable immigration of early Arab Islamic refugees—a movement that has been called the "first hejira."<sup>52</sup> The first wave of Muhammad's followers to flee Mecca did not go to Medina. In 622 C.E., they were welcomed instead by the *negusa* (king or emperor) of Aksum. They settled mostly in the coastal areas of eastern Ethiopia, and over the next few generations they grew in number and strength, eventually becoming a threat to the Christian kings who had originally welcomed them.<sup>53</sup>

### Christian Dynasties

By the mid-10th century, the Christian communities had weakened while the expanding Islamic community in the east had strengthened. The Kingdom of Aksum had become a small, inland Christian enclave. The Christians withdrew from the coast, and over the next several centuries they established several ruling dynasties. The first was founded by the kings of Zagwe. The Coptic Christians of Egypt sent the Zagwe kings a bishop

<sup>50</sup> Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry, eds., "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Origins and the Early Periods: The Aksumite State," in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4373.html>

<sup>52</sup> *Hegira* is an Arabic term meaning "flight to avoid capture or persecution."

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Najib Mohammad, "The Haven of the First Hijra (Migration): An African Nation is the Muslims' First Refuge," *Selamta.net*, 4 March 2009, <http://www.selamta.net/ethiopian%20muslims%20history.htm>

patriarch, an emissary for religious guidance. The rulers of the Zagwe Dynasty (c. 1137–1270 C.E.) commissioned the famous stone churches that are carved into the mountains of northern Ethiopia.<sup>54</sup>

In 1270, an Amhara nobleman from the south, Yekuno Amlak, seized the Zagwe throne and proclaimed himself the first king of the new Solomonic Dynasty. Claiming to be a descendent of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Yekuno ruled until 1285, when his son, Yagba Siyon, came to power. After Yagba's death, the dynasty suffered several years of conflict as various descendants of Yekuno fought for the throne. Around the beginning of the 14th century, the dynasty instituted a practice that persisted until the mid-16th century: all male descendants of Yekuno, except for the ruling emperor and his sons, were imprisoned for life in a mountaintop fortress. Thereafter, when the reigning emperor died, his firstborn son took power and his other sons were subsequently imprisoned with the rest of the male descendants.<sup>55</sup>



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Ottoman architecture  
in Massawa

### Abyssinian Kings

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Ottoman Turks arrived in the port of Massawa. In 1557, they seized the offshore islands and coastal areas near Massawa. For most of the next 300 years, the coastal lowlands remained a protectorate and trading outpost of the Ottoman Empire, although other entities intermittently took control. Meanwhile, in the Ethiopian highlands, the Christian, Amharic-speaking kings Menas (1560–64) and Sarsa Dengel (1564–97) resisted the inland expansion of Islamic communities and consolidated their influence among the tribes of the north and south. They made Gondar, near Aksum, their permanent capital and claimed descent from King Solomon (a practice that continues today). The use of the name Abyssinia(n) also dates from this period; it derives from the Egyptian Arabic word *Habashina*, meaning the copper-skinned descendants of Aksum.

### Colonial Powers in East Africa

In 1805, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, became governor of Egypt. After coming to power, Muhammad Ali sent his Egyptian army to the Hejaz (western Arabia) and Yemen in an effort to extend Egyptian influence. He later added Crete, Palestine, and Nubia, as well as the border regions with Ethiopia, to his domain. For more than 100 years, he and his descendants wielded great power. Before his death in 1849, he envisioned creating a canal in the Sinai that would link the Mediterranean and Red seas. In 1854, the project was inaugurated by his grandson, Khedive Ismail. It was

<sup>54</sup> Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry, eds., “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Origins and the Early Periods: The Zagwe Dynasty,” in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4375.html>

<sup>55</sup> Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry, eds., “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Origins and the Early Periods: The ‘Restoration’ of the ‘Solomonic’ Line,” in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4376.html>

<sup>9</sup> Atlapedia Online, “Eritrea,” 1993–2008, <http://www.atlapedia.com/online/countries/eritrea.htm>

financed by the Franco-British-Egyptian Suez Canal Company. After 15 years, the Suez Canal's engineer, Count Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805–1894), witnessed the opening of the waterway in 1869. Thereafter, the Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab acquired new importance for European powers, who were poised to assert their ambitions.<sup>56</sup>



© Auguste Couder  
Muhammad Ali Pasha, 1830

The Italians opened a consulate in Massawa in 1840, as did the French in 1848 and the British in 1849. After the Egyptian occupation of Keren in 1853, European powers reacted by strengthening their presence in the area. The British were afraid that Egypt, their ally and trading partner, had grown too strong. Soon, the Italians asserted claims to Eritrea and Somaliland as part of a European land grab in East Africa. The French based their claims on treaty interests in the Sudan following the Napoleonic victories in Egypt, and they established a colony in East Africa known as French Somaliland. The British also had territorial interests in the Sudan, which later led to the famous battles between Muhammad Ahmad, also known as the Mahdi, and General “Chinese” Gordon in Khartoum. In short, East Africa had become a theater for European rivalry.<sup>57</sup>

## The Italian Era

### *Initial Italian Control*

Under the ambiguous Treaty of Wuchale (1889), Italy, who had the strongest footing in eastern and northcentral Ethiopia, gained Eritrea as a protectorate.<sup>58</sup> Eager to connect Eritrea and Ethiopia with Italian Somaliland in the south, the Italians launched a military bid to capture all of Ethiopia. At the Battle of Adwa, 1 March 1896, Emperor Menelik II forced the Italian expeditionary army out of central and southern Ethiopia. The Italians did manage to keep a foothold in the northern province of Eritrea.<sup>59</sup>



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
The Battle of Adwa, tapestry detail

Ethiopia had been a small satellite of the Ottoman Empire since the early 17th century. Thus it was aligned with the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) during the First World War. Italy joined the war on 23 May 1915, on the side of the Alliance (Britain, France, and Russia). At the end of the war in 1918,

<sup>56</sup> William Ochsenwald and Sydney Nettleton Fisher, *The Middle East: A History*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 286-291.

<sup>57</sup> BBC World Service, “The Story of Africa: Africa and Europe (1800–1914)—Egypt and Sudan,” 2 February 2009, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624\\_story\\_of\\_africa/page37.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624_story_of_africa/page37.shtml)

<sup>58</sup> Carlo Giglio, “Article 17 of the Treaty of Ucciali,” *Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (July 1965): 221–231.

<sup>59</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Battle of Adwa,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/6864/Battle-of-Adwa>

the possessions of the former Central Powers were divided principally between Britain and France. The postwar Italian government believed that its support of the Allies justified a claim to Ethiopia. Over the next 20 years, the Italians continued to develop the infrastructure of Eritrea with an eye to southward expansion. They had engineered the railway line that runs up the escarpment from Massawa to Asmara (1911) and from Asmara to Akordat (1922). This railway, which features more than 30 tunnels and 65 bridges, is considered a remarkable feat of engineering.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Capture of Ethiopia*

In late 1935, Italy again attempted to seize more Ethiopian territory, and it finally captured the capital, Addis Ababa.<sup>61</sup> On 9 May 1936, Fascist Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, reported to the League of Nations in Geneva that Italian forces in Abyssinia (as Italy then called Ethiopia) had restored peace to a “troubled” province. In the 6-month campaign, Mussolini’s son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, had commanded an air squadron, and poison gas was used against noncombatant Ethiopians. Social unrest temporarily subsided after Addis Ababa was captured. The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, successor to Menelik II, fled the country. Soon, Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy, declared himself Emperor of Abyssinia, and Mussolini sent his African prefect, General Graziani, to Addis Ababa to supervise the continued pacification of the region.



© Michael David Murphy  
View of Addis Ababa

Fascist Italy had three main goals in the region: (1) the exploitation of natural resources in the Horn of Africa; (2) securing a strategic presence on the Red Sea coast; and (3) the resettlement of Italians in the colony. The colony was to be “de-Ethiopianized” and symbols of the historic past were to be removed.<sup>62</sup> The Great Obelisk of Aksum, as well as the stone Lion of Judah and the statue of Emperor Menelik II, were shipped to Italy. Jewels, crowns, precious metals, and portable cultural monuments made their way to Rome.

But when Italy became an Axis power in 1940, British forces in the Sudan moved against the Italians in Ethiopia, driving them back into Eritrea. On 1 April, Asmara fell to the British, marking the end of the Italian occupation. Not long after, in April 1942, the United States opened a consulate in Asmara.

<sup>60</sup> Rob Dickinson, “Eritrean Railway Revival,” The International Steam Pages, 2002, <http://www.internationalsteam.co.uk/trains/eritrea07.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Shively, “Italian Occupation of Addis Ababa: 1936–1941,” Macalester College, n.d., <http://www.macalester.edu/courses/GEOG61/kshively/ital>

<sup>62</sup> E. Tannenbaum, “The Goals of Italian Fascism,” *American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (1969): 1183–1204.

## British Ethiopia

During the war years, 1941–1945, Eritrea was a province of British Ethiopia, and the ports of Massawa and Assab became staging areas for the British Asian fleet. Under the U.S.–UK “Lend Lease” program, Britain provided the United States with bases in Asmara (army) and Massawa (navy) in exchange for war materials. After the war, Eritrea lost its importance to Britain. British forces withdrew, leaving a skeleton civil affairs administration. Meanwhile, the country suffered



© Marco Fera  
Site fo the Battle of Keren

from a defunct economy and widespread unemployment. The fate of Ethiopia and Eritrea fell to a Four Powers Commission in 1946. When the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union could not agree on the future of Eritrea, the matter was referred to the United Nations General Assembly. In September 1952, a UN resolution officially designated Eritrea as a federal component of Ethiopia.<sup>63</sup> This framework provided Eritrea with its own constitution and administrative structure—to allow it to retain some autonomy.<sup>64</sup>

## The Struggle for Independence

### *The 1950s and 1960s*

The postwar period in Eritrea was characterized by political strife and economic stagnation. Throughout the 1950s, the Eritreans—particularly Muslims—were repressed by the Ethiopians, who resented Eritreans’ wartime collaboration with the Italians and British. In several breaches of the Eritrean constitution, the Ethiopian government instituted repressive measures targeting the Eritrean Muslim community, and it banned political parties (1955) and trade unions (1958) in the state. These and other measures provoked resentment among Eritreans of all classes and religious backgrounds. Their dissatisfaction grew to dissent. In 1956, dock workers at the port of Massawa held several demonstrations. On 10 March 1958, a general workers’ strike broke out in Asmara and other Eritrean towns.<sup>65</sup>



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Hamid Idris Awate, 1961

Despite these protests, Ethiopia continued to impose its authority on Eritrea. After already effectively losing its autonomy, Eritrea was finally stripped of its federal status in 1962, when it was officially annexed as a province of Ethiopia. Thereafter, Ethiopia

<sup>63</sup> UN General Assembly, “Eritrea: Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea; Report of the Interim Committee of the General Assembly on the Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea.” (A/Res/5/390A), 2 December 1950.

<sup>64</sup> HistoryWorld, “History of Ethiopia: 19th–20th Century,” 1 April 2009, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=2114&HistoryID=ab92>

<sup>65</sup> J. Paul, “Development of a Revolution,” in *Upheaval in the Horn: Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia* (Washington, DC: Middle East Research & Information Project, 1977): 19–23.

replaced the local Eritrean language, Tigrinya, with Amharic as the region's official language of education—a move that prompted further outrage among Eritreans.<sup>66</sup>

In July 1962, a farmer, Hamid Idris Awate, and 13 followers attacked a series of Ethiopian police stations in the western lowlands (Mt. Adal, Halhal, and Gognie). They seized arms and ammunition. Enthusiasm for Awate's resistance to Ethiopian rule quickly spread among Eritreans, and a number of liberation movements subsequently developed. By 1965, there were three principal groups: the mixed ELM (Eritrean Liberation Movement), the Christian PLF (People's Liberation Front), and the Muslim ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front). Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, these factions battled each other, thus delaying the unified struggle for independence by 15 years. Finally in 1981, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) emerged as the umbrella movement that united the resistance forces.<sup>67</sup>

### *Mengistu and the Derg*

During the economic stagnation of the early 1970s, a Soviet-backed Ethiopian movement, the Worker's Party of Ethiopia, produced a leader: Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Mengistu claimed a connection to Emperor Haile Selassie through an ancestor who had been a tribal midwife at Selassie's birth. In a palace coup on 22 August 1974, the aging Haile Selassie was seized from his bed and taken to a secret location. A hastily assembled Revolutionary Council ordered the execution of 59 members of the royal family. In early 1975, Selassie died under suspicious circumstances and was secretly buried under a palace latrine.<sup>68</sup>



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Mengistu Haile Mariam, 1986

Mengistu and his party ushered in the era of the “Derg,” or the Marxist revolutionary committee. Parliament was dissolved and the Derg became the central authority. On 9 March 1975, a day now known as “Black Sunday,” forces under the command of Mengistu gunned down 200 civilians in the Eritrean town of Akordat. Other massacres against Eritreans followed as the Soviets airlifted massive amounts of arms to Ethiopia.<sup>69, 70</sup> During the “Red Terror” of 1977–78, several thousand opponents of Mengistu were hunted down and summarily executed. Their bodies were left on the streets as a warning to others.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea: History: Federation with Ethiopia: Failure of the Federal Scheme,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>67</sup> Dan Connell, *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Princeton: Red Sea Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>70</sup> HistoryWorld, “History of Ethiopia: 19th–20th Century,” 1 April 2009, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=2114&HistoryID=ab92>

<sup>71</sup> *Somaliland Times*, “Ethiopia: Ruling in Col. Mengistu Case is Postponed,” 24 May 2006, <http://somalilandtimes.net/sl/2005/227/6.shtml>

### *Continued Eritrean Resistance*

Over the next 10 years, Ethiopia initiated several military offensives in an effort to take control of Eritrea and quell the resistance movement. Border areas were seized, but the Ethiopians were unable to completely subdue the Eritrean province. In 1988, forces of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) began to win battles.<sup>72</sup> They took Afabet (headquarters of the Ethiopian Army) and, in 1989, the important town of Keren (Eritrea's second-largest city).<sup>73</sup> These victories were followed by the fierce battle for the port of Massawa in 1990.<sup>74</sup> As the Eritreans grew stronger, Ethiopian resistance to Mengistu and the Marxist government began to grow as well. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) emerged as a united opposition front to defeat Mengistu.



© Dawit Rezené  
War Memorial in Massawa

The EPRDF's march to Addis Ababa in 1989 was the beginning of the end for the Marxist government. The Ethiopian economy was in ruin because support from Eastern European socialist regimes ceased as they became defunct. The Soviet Union, which had supported Mengistu and supplied arms to Ethiopia, was also about to fall. In May 1991, EPLF forces took control of Asmara, the Eritrean capital, effectively liberating the region from Ethiopian control. That same month, Mengistu fled Ethiopia as his regime collapsed. The dictator, who was responsible for massive human rights violations, including murders, massacres, and the starvation of more than 1 million Ethiopians, found refuge in Zimbabwe, where he still lives as a wealthy and guarded man. The Ethiopian Supreme Court has since sentenced Mengistu *in absentia* to death for his crimes—a penalty that could be carried out if he were extradited to his native Ethiopia.<sup>75</sup>

### Independent Eritrea

#### *Self-Determination*

With the collapse of the Mengistu government in 1991, the final push for Eritrean independence began. After capturing the capital, the EPLF made efforts to form a provisional government. In April 1993, this government held a referendum on self-determination, with 99% of the voters opting for independence under the banner of the EPLF. On 24 May 1993, the newly elected President Isaias Afwerki, leader of the EPLF, took power. The EPLF was immediately dissolved and replaced with a new party, the

<sup>72</sup> International Crisis Group, "Eritrea: The Siege State," Africa Report No. 163, 21 September 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/ethiopia-eritrea/163%20Eritrea%20The%20Siege%20State.pdf>

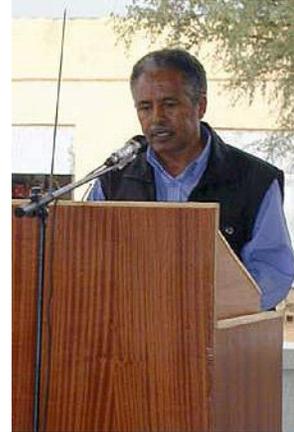
<sup>73</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>74</sup> Tracey L. Cousin, "Eritrean and Ethiopian Civil War," ICE (Inventory of Conflict and Environment) Case Studies No. 2, November, 1997, <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/eritrea.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Voice of America News, "Mengistu Death Sentence Kindles Expectations for His Extradition," 28 May 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2008-05-28-voa3.html>

People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The PFDJ has remained the country's only legal political party since the revolution.<sup>76</sup>

In the following months, Isaias Afwerki and the National Assembly worked together to improve the welfare of Eritreans and the standing of the nation. Their first concern was internal policy. The National Assembly worked diligently to improve the nation's infrastructure, creating roads and electricity grids, extending the phone system, and establishing schools and hospitals. It also drew up a provisional constitution creating laws and policies to protect human rights and repair the economy. A more complete version of the constitution was approved in 1997.



USAID photo  
President Isaias Afwerki

Initially, the transitional government also was determined to develop and pursue a cooperative foreign policy. They made efforts to create good relations with major regional and world powers, including the United States and the European Union, the Gulf Arab states, and China. They believed that the wealthier nations would provide development aid. World powers were quick to respond, creating substantial economic aid and development packages.

### *Renewed Conflict*

The country's promising development suffered a disastrous setback in the form of a renewed conflict with Ethiopia, which erupted in 1998 and continued for over 2 years. After initially developing normalized relations in the post-independence era, the countries went to war over a dispute concerning economic issues and the demarcation of their border. The intense conflict left approximately 100,000 Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers dead and displaced up to 25% of the Eritrean population. Moreover, the country's developing economy and infrastructure suffered significant damage, largely because of Ethiopian occupation of some of Eritrea's most economically viable areas.<sup>77, 78</sup> The countries signed a peace treaty on 12 December 2000, but tensions remained high.<sup>79</sup>



© Dawit Rezené  
UN soldiers on camels

Following the treaty, the United Nations took several major steps toward resolving the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Foremost, it established the United Nations

<sup>76</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>79</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "Ethiopia/Eritrea War," 11 July 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/eritrea.htm>

Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). As a result of the recommendations of military observers in UNMEE, a peacekeeping force was dispatched on 15 March 2001 to patrol the frontier between the two countries. As an additional measure, the UN established taskforces to study the food needs of Eritreans, as well as the sale of weapons to states in the Horn of Africa.<sup>80</sup>

The work of the boundary commission was repeatedly hampered by disagreement. The commission initially came to a decision in 2002, but the proposed settlement was rejected by Ethiopia. The EEBC later set a November 2007 deadline for the final demarcation of the border, but Ethiopia again rejected the agreement and continued to occupy areas that the commission had allocated to Eritrea.<sup>81</sup> Claiming to have fulfilled its role, the EEBC dissolved itself after the deadline passed. Likewise, in 2008, the UNMEE pulled out of the border zone because of restrictions placed on the mission by the Eritrean government.<sup>82</sup> At that time, as many as 250,000 troops from both countries continued to occupy trenches along the border.<sup>83</sup>

### *“Self-Reliance”*

Throughout this time, Isaias Afwerki’s government grew increasingly isolated. In 2005, Eritrea asked the United States to halt its aid operations to the country.<sup>84</sup> That request came as part of the government’s stated policy of self-reliance, which has led to the rejection of significant sums of foreign aid from international organizations. The policy also has been cited as the driving force behind the institution of governmental controls on the economy.<sup>85</sup> Many observers have questioned the government’s isolationist approach, particularly because drought and the effects of war have frequently limited the country’s food supply in recent years.<sup>86</sup>



© APK/ wikipedia.org  
Eritrean Embassy in  
Washington D.C.

Moreover, the single-party government has consolidated its power and demonstrated a rigid intolerance of internal criticism and dissent. The country’s democratic aspirations have yet to be fulfilled, because general elections planned for December 2001 have been indefinitely

<sup>80</sup> United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, “Background,” 2008, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmee/background.html>

<sup>81</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea,” in *The World Factbook*, 14 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>82</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Profile: Eritrea,” September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> Peter Martell, “Not so Fond Farewell to Eritrea,” *BBC News*, 10 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7283293.stm>

<sup>84</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” March 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>85</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>86</sup> Edmund Sanders, “Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

postponed. Instead, the transitional government remains in power, and the country's ratified constitution has not been implemented.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, on 25 September 2001, ownership of all private media was suspended. Since then, numerous dissidents and journalists have disappeared, including several government officials and correspondents for major news organizations. Likewise, government detention centers and prisons—such as those at Adi Abeto, Embatka, Eriaeiro, and Dogola—have gained notoriety as centers for abuse.<sup>88</sup>

Human rights organizations have reported on the Eritrean government's repressive and abusive measures. In late 2005, Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented Eritrean interference with UN humanitarian activities, as well as the arrest, imprisonment, and torture of political dissenters. More recently, in 2009, HRW released a report describing the government's practice of indefinite military conscription and other abuses, including illegal detention, torture, forced labor, and religious persecution.<sup>89</sup> These conditions have motivated tens of thousands of Eritreans to seek refuge in nearby countries, including Ethiopia.<sup>90</sup> In doing so, they have faced severe punishment for themselves and their families; foreign travel has continued to be restricted for much of the population, and military conscription has remained in effect.<sup>91</sup>

#### Recent Events

The Eritrean government's defensive mentality manifested in yet another border disagreement in 2008—this time with Djibouti. In June of that year, an armed conflict between troops on each side of the border resulted in numerous fatalities and injuries. In December 2009, the UN placed sanctions on Eritrea for failing to resolve the border conflict with Djibouti and for supporting Islamic militants in Somalia: specifically, the al-Shabaab terrorist group.<sup>92,93</sup> The situation further



© Charles Fred  
View of Asmara

<sup>87</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>88</sup> Amnesty International, "Eritrea: You Have no Right to Ask—Government Resists Scrutiny on Human Rights," 18 May 2004, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR64/003/2004/en/e3202b2b-d5f6-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/afr640032004en.html>

<sup>89</sup> Reuters, "Rights Group Condemns Eritrea over Detentions," 16 April 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSLFF80172.CH.2400>

<sup>90</sup> Refugees International, "Ethiopia-Eritrea: Stalemate Takes Toll on Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin," 30 May 2008, <http://www.refintl.org/policy/field-report/ethiopia-eritrea-stalemate-takes-toll-eritreans-and-ethiopians-eritrean-origin>

<sup>91</sup> Reuters, "Rights Group Condemns Eritrea over Detentions," 16 April 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/04/16/idUSLFF80172.CH.2400>

<sup>92</sup> UN News Centre, "Security Council Welcomes Agreement between Eritrea and Djibouti to End Border Dispute," 11 June 2010, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35005&Cr=djibouti&Cr1>

<sup>93</sup> UN News Centre, "Djibouti-Eritrea Border Tension Could Escalate, Warns UN Team," 18 September 2008, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28109&Cr=djibouti&Cr1=eritrea>

destabilized a country already wracked by the border conflict with Ethiopia, as well as the consequences of drought, economic stagnation, and repressive policies. As of 2011, Eritrea continued to be one of the world's poorest nations.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), "About LDCs," n.d., <http://www.unohrls.org/en/lde/25/>

## Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Islam arrived in the Eritrean region several centuries before Christianity.  
**False**  
The religions reached the Eritrean region shortly after they developed: Christianity arrived in the early second century C.E. and Islam in the early seventh century.
2. In 1557, the Greeks seized the offshore islands and coastal areas of what is modern Eritrea.  
**False**  
The Ottoman Turks seized the offshore islands and coastal areas near Massawa in 1557. For most of the next 300 years, the coastal lowlands remained an Ottoman protectorate and trading outpost.
3. In 1889, Italy established a protectorate in Eritrea.  
**True**  
Under the Treaty of Wuchale (1889), Italy, which at the time had the strongest footing in eastern and northcentral Ethiopia, obtained Eritrea as a protectorate.
4. Mengistu Haile Mariam came to power through a coup.  
**True**  
Mengistu initiated a coup in 1974, removing the aging Emperor Haile Salassie.
5. Eritrea achieved full independence from Somalia in 1993 after years of warfare.  
**False**  
Eritrea's government proclaimed full independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after the protracted war between the two countries finally ended.

## Chapter 3 Economy

### Introduction

Once Eritrea gained independence in 1993 after three decades of war with Ethiopia, the Eritrean economy rebounded with an average yearly growth rate of 10.9% between 1993 and 1997. But when a border dispute ignited 2 more years of fighting, the growth rate fell to -13.1% in 2000.<sup>95, 96, 97</sup> Although the initial growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was mirrored by progress in infrastructure and the standard of living, the return to hostilities with Ethiopia deterred foreign investment and disrupted bilateral trade.<sup>98</sup>



© Peter Casier/ UN World Food Programme  
Women fetch water in rural Eritrea

Afterward, the Eritrean government instituted broad economic controls, including strict regulations on trade, foreign investment, and exchange. These measures contradicted the government's previous commitment to a market economy, and severely constrained the private sector.<sup>99</sup> Today, aside from small enterprises, most businesses are operated by the government.<sup>100</sup>

Among the economic goals of President Isaias Afwerki, a priority has been to dispel foreign influence and establish economic self-sufficiency before reentering the global market.<sup>101</sup> Because of this policy, the government has rejected significant sums of foreign aid since 2005—even while facing severe food shortages caused by drought and the ongoing border dispute with Ethiopia.<sup>102, 103</sup> The majority of Eritrea's population live in rural areas and continue to work in agriculture.<sup>104</sup> Agriculture—already prone to

<sup>95</sup> The World Bank, "Eritrea: Country Brief," April 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/CSITZX5Z80>

<sup>96</sup> The World Bank, "Eritrea Data Profile," 2010, [http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?REPORT\\_ID=9147&REQUEST\\_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED&DIMENSIONS=78](http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?REPORT_ID=9147&REQUEST_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED&DIMENSIONS=78)

<sup>97</sup> Langdon D. Clough, ed., "Energy Profile of Eritrea," *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, 4 March 2007, [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy\\_profile\\_of\\_Eritrea](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy_profile_of_Eritrea)

<sup>98</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Economy," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>100</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2009 Investment Climate Statement—Eritrea," March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2011/157273.htm>

<sup>101</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>102</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>103</sup> Ed Harris, "Self-Reliance Could Cost Eritrea Dear," *BBC News*, 5 July 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/5121212.stm>

<sup>104</sup> The World Bank, "Eritrea: Country Brief," April 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/CSITZX5Z80>

instability because of the region's highly variable rains—has suffered from a loss of workers to military conscription in recent years.<sup>105</sup>

### Standard of Living

In 2010, Eritrea's annual average per capita income was approximately USD 600, making it one of the world's poorest countries.<sup>106</sup> Its 2009 human development index (HDI) score—a measure of national well-being based on average income, life expectancy, literacy, and educational attainment—ranked the country 165 out of 182 countries, below its neighbors Sudan (150) and Djibouti (155) but above Ethiopia (171).<sup>107</sup> Although the nation has shown some improvements (e.g., reductions in the rates of infant mortality and HIV prevalence), the Eritrean population remains vulnerable to food insecurity and undernutrition.<sup>108</sup> The government has disallowed independent evaluations of social indicators in recent years.<sup>109</sup>



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Mother and daughter in Keren

Ultimately, the government's control of the country's limited resources results in food and fuel rationing.<sup>110</sup> Ration coupons are used to obtain necessities from government-run stores, and lines for bread, milk, and cooking fuel are common.<sup>111</sup> Shortages often result from unproductive growing seasons, restrictions on trade (including border closures), and lack of foreign exchange. Eritreans may resort to purchasing goods on the black market, but prices are high.<sup>112</sup> Inflation rates as high as 20% (2010) have driven up the cost of essential goods in recent years.<sup>113</sup> In addition to subsidized commodities, the state officially provides healthcare and education, but some have questioned the value of these services in a country without guaranteed civil liberties and a free, functional economy. Hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled (at a rate of 3,000 per month in 2010) for Ethiopia and Sudan.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>106</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>107</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming Barriers," 2009, [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Complete.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> UNICEF, "Eritrea," 2011, [http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/files/HAC2011\\_4pager\\_Eritrea.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/files/HAC2011_4pager_Eritrea.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02,1,2576926.story>

<sup>110</sup> The World Bank, "Eritrea: Country Brief," April 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/CSITZX5Z80>

<sup>111</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, "Resentment and Rations as Eritrea Nears a Crisis," *New York Times*, 16 October 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/16/world/africa/16eritrea.html?pagewanted=1& r=2>

<sup>112</sup> Peter Martell, "Eritrea Shackles Youth in Struggle for 'Self-Reliance,'" *Abbay Media*, 27 May 2008, <http://abbaymedia.com/News/?p=893>

<sup>113</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>114</sup> UNHCR, "Eritrea," January 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e4838e6>

## Agriculture

Approximately 80% of Eritreans earn their livelihood from agriculture or animal husbandry. But in 2010, the agricultural sector accounted for only 14.5% of GDP.<sup>115</sup> The disparity between the sector's large, dependent workforce and its minimal economic output helps to explain the country's high poverty rate. In fact, most agricultural and pastoral activity is for subsistence, with limited surpluses available for market. The central highlands region is the area



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Crops in drought, Eritrea

best suited for cultivation; major crops include teff (a native cereal), barley, wheat, corn, millet, sorghum, and various fruits and vegetables.<sup>116</sup> Cotton and tobacco also are grown as cash crops. Pastoralism, or animal herding, is predominant in the drier, lowland regions, where cultivation is often difficult or impossible. In addition to raising livestock (mainly sheep, goats, cattle, and camels), pastoralists may trade dairy and other animal products. Some pastoral groups are nomadic or semi-nomadic. Fishing is an important activity in coastal areas.

The agricultural sector has been stifled by a number of factors. Eritrea possesses limited arable land (less than 5%), and variable rainfall patterns frequently result in drought.<sup>117</sup> Long-term and unsustainable use has exhausted soils and degraded the landscape. War and its aftermath—including the distribution of land mines—also have caused land loss and disrupted crop production. Finally, the lack of credit, investment, and modern farming techniques and equipment have prevented development.<sup>118</sup> As a result, crop yields remain highly variable and often insufficient to meet demands. According to the UN, Eritrea's annual domestic cereal production from 1998 to 2006 met only 30% of its needs, on average. From year to year, however, that figure fluctuated dramatically from 8% to 70%.<sup>119</sup> Generally, the domestic food supply is insufficient, even when rainfall levels are adequate.<sup>120</sup>

## Industry

Eritrea's industrial base was established during the Italian colonial period, when the small colony reached a higher level of development than Ethiopia. After Ethiopia annexed the region (in 1962, officially), it dismantled most of Eritrea's factories as it shifted production and further development to its own territory. By the time Eritrea gained

<sup>115</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>116</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: Economy: Agriculture," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>117</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>118</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Economy," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> Reuters, "Drought-Prone Eritrea May Need Outside Aid—UN Envoy," 22 Jun 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL22807824>

<sup>120</sup> The World Bank, "Eritrea: Country Brief," April 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/CSITZX5Z80>

independence in 1993, local industrial production had ceased, and its remaining factories were badly in need of repair and investment. After a short period of post-independence growth, the industrial sector has been stifled by war and lack of investment—although certain industries, such as fish processing, have demonstrated potential.<sup>121</sup> In addition to food processing, the country's industrial activity today centers on beverage products, textiles and clothing, light manufacturing, salt, and cement.<sup>122</sup> In 2010, industry accounted for 22.5% of GDP with an estimated growth rate of 8%.<sup>123</sup> Most industrial production takes place in Asmara and in and around Massawa.



© Charles Roffey  
Man waiting for a bus in Asmara

Future industrial growth centers on extracting the country's substantial mineral resources, which include deposits of gold, copper, silver, lead, zinc, iron ore, gypsum, marble, potash, salt, and other minerals, many of which remain largely unexploited.<sup>124, 125</sup> The Eritrean government has issued exploration licenses to more than 20 companies from Australia, Canada, China, Libya, and the United Kingdom, among others.<sup>126</sup> Many of these companies have already begun exploring. One mineral extraction site, known as Bisha, holds an estimated 1.14 million ounces of gold, 821 million ounces of copper, 1.3 billion pounds of zinc, and 11.9 million ounces of silver.<sup>127, 128</sup> The Canadian Nevsun Resources Inc. began mining Bisha in early 2011. The project is one of many joint ventures in mining that the government has planned and hopes to develop as a major part of its economic strategy.

Though the mining sector does at times receive preferential treatment, the government's reversals of decisions and other "arbitrary and capricious measures" may impair further investment in industry.<sup>129</sup> In addition, despite its position as a potential leader in the mining surge, Eritrea may face sanctions on its mining sector.<sup>130</sup> East Africa's

<sup>121</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Economy," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>122</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>123</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>124</sup> Harold R. Newman, "The Mineral Industry of Eritrea," in *2009 Mineral Yearbook*, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, September 2010, <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2009/myb3-2009-er.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>126</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2011 Investment Climate Statement—Eritrea," March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2011/157273.htm>

<sup>127</sup> Bisha Mining Share Company, "Description," n.d., <http://www.bishamining.com/index.php/project>

<sup>128</sup> Nevsun, "Welcome to Nevsun Resources," n.d., <http://www.nevsun.com/>

<sup>129</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2011 Investment Climate Statement—Eritrea," March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2011/157273.htm>

<sup>130</sup> Jeremy Clark, "Experts See Eritrea Leading Regional Mining Surge," Reuters, 1 February 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE61008K20100201?sp=true>

Intergovernmental Authority on Development has asked the UN to impose sanctions on Eritrea for supporting militants fighting in Somalia.<sup>131</sup>

### Banking and Currency

All banks and financial institutions in Eritrea are owned and operated by the government. This includes the National Bank of Eritrea (the country's primary financial institution), the Commercial Bank of Eritrea, the Housing and Commerce Bank of Eritrea, the Agricultural and Industrial Bank of Eritrea, and the Eritrean Investment and Development Bank. These are all centered in the national capital (although some have branches), and their services account for a major share of the nation's service-sector activity.<sup>132</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia  
Eritrean currency

Eritrean law requires all foreign exchange to be routed through the National Bank of Eritrea. In this way, the government controls all official financial transfers in and out of the country.<sup>133</sup> This includes foreign remittances, which were estimated at more than 32% of GDP as of 2010. Eritreans working abroad—the source of the remittances—also face a voluntary 2% tax on their foreign incomes.<sup>134</sup> They often comply because of potential losses of rights or property in their homeland. The tax is collected through Eritrea's foreign consulates and contributes significantly to the Eritrean economy.<sup>135</sup>

The Eritrean government created the national currency, the nakfa (named after the stronghold of the Eritrean resistance movement), in 1997 to replace the Ethiopian *birr*.<sup>136</sup> Floated at one time on the international market, the nakfa (ERN) is now artificially pegged by the National Bank at an exchange rate of ERN 15/USD 1. Higher rates can be found on the black market, although people who engage in unofficial currency exchange face stiff penalties from the government.<sup>137</sup> This is because of the preciousness of foreign exchange, of which the government maintains only a limited reserve. The government has extended its monopoly on official foreign exchange transfers to restrict the financial activity of foreign business owners, including the transfer of local profits to their home

<sup>131</sup> Aaron Maasho, "Bloc Calls for AU, UN sanctions on Eritrea Mining," Reuters, 4 July 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/eritreaNews/idAFLDE76319520110704?sp=true>

<sup>132</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Economy," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2009 Investment Climate Statement—Eritrea," February 2009, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/117864.htm>

<sup>134</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>135</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>136</sup> United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Eritrea Travel Advice," 1 August 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea>

<sup>137</sup> Ed Harris, "Eritrea Cracks Down on Black Market Currency Trade," *Sudan Tribune*, 14 April 2005, [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id\\_article=9066](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=9066)

countries.<sup>138</sup> Overall, the majority of economic activity is cash-based; ATMs are nonexistent, and only a few businesses accept credit cards.<sup>139</sup> There is no stock market or stock exchange.

## Trade

Eritrea's trade activity has been severely disrupted by its ongoing border dispute with Ethiopia, as well as the government's related economic restrictions. Ethiopia had been a major destination for Eritrean exports, but the border has been closed for years.<sup>140</sup> Since Eritrea lacks a sufficient domestic food supply and a diversified industrial base, it relies heavily on imports, particularly food, fuel, machinery, and military, India, and Russia.<sup>141</sup> In recent years, Eritrea has expanded its trade ties with neighboring Sudan as a result of improved bilateral relations.<sup>142</sup> Its major import partners were the EU, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and India. Major exports include livestock, sorghum, textiles, food and small manufactures; the main imports are machinery, petroleum products, food, and manufactured goods.<sup>143</sup>



© Hans van der Splinter & Mebrat Tzehaie  
Dockyard in Massawa

A major factor in expanding trade operations is the functionality of the major port at Massawa. After suffering extensive damage during the war for independence, the port has been the focus of the government's revitalization efforts, as part of its economic development plans. These efforts have included the construction of new infrastructure (including cranes), a hotel complex, and residential housing. Most importantly, the government has designated the area as a free-trade zone to attract foreign business activity and investment. Such a designation makes it one of the few opportunities for private business in the country, and its prime location on Red Sea shipping lanes would seem to make it attractive to foreign entities.

The free trade zone in the port of Massawa, still under construction, will extend to other areas including Assab, and will encompass factories and warehouses as well as new roads and an airport.<sup>144, 145</sup> China, Djibouti, Dubai, India, Israel, Italy, and Sudan have firms

<sup>138</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "2009 Investment Climate Statement—Eritrea," February 2009, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/117864.htm>

<sup>139</sup> United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Eritrea Travel Advice," 1 August 2011, <http://www.fc.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea> ,

<sup>140</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm#econ>

<sup>141</sup> World Trade Organization, "Eritrea Country Profile," March 2011, <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=ER>

<sup>142</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm#econ>

<sup>143</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>144</sup> Rahel Asghedom, "Eritrea Plans to Construct a New and Modern Regional Port in Massawa," Tesfa News, 5 May 2011, <http://tesfanews.net/archives/1996>

registered to use the port at Massawa—mainly for lower-end, small-scale production of construction materials and electronics, and food processing.<sup>146</sup>

## Energy

As of 2010, Eritrea did not possess proven reserves of oil or natural gas.<sup>147</sup> The country imports all its petroleum. In 2009, it consumed approximately 5,000 barrels a day.<sup>148</sup> Because of shortages, the government rations petroleum supplies. Non-commercial gasoline consumers are most affected by this measure. In 2007, gasoline sold for USD 11 per gallon in the capital, at a time when more than half the population was thought to be living on less than USD 1 per day.<sup>149</sup>



© Eric Lafforgue  
Street in Asmara

Eritrea does not produce or consume natural gas or coal. Electricity is the primary energy source for Eritreans in cities and larger towns. An oil-fired plant near Massawa generates the power, which is distributed to regional substations. The World Bank has provided funds to improve and expand the electrical grid, but the electricity supply still does not extend to most of the country's remote areas.<sup>150</sup> But some villages possess small diesel generators, and many rural schools and health clinics have solar power systems to meet their basic needs.<sup>151</sup> Eritreans beyond electrified areas often rely on biomass fuels for basic cooking and heating.<sup>152</sup>

Eritrea's territorial waters were initially probed for oil in the 1960s, but frequent conflict and a lack of discovery have stifled subsequent efforts. Among the unsuccessful explorations were those of a few U.S.-based companies in the 1990s and the early 2000s. One venture targeted a block in northeastern Eritrea, a region that also failed to yield results.<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, in late 2008, the Eritrean government signed an offshore

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<sup>145</sup> Tesfa News, "Eritrea Investing 1.4 Billion Nafka on Ports and Another 460 on Railway Expansion," 8 March 2011, <http://tesfanews.net/archives/1740>

<sup>146</sup> Andrew Cawthorne, "Eritrea to Launch Massawa, Assab Free Trade Zones," Reuters, 19 May 2009, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJJOE54I06B20090519?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>

<sup>147</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>148</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Eritrea Country Analysis Brief," 14 July 2010, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=ER>

<sup>149</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>150</sup> All Africa, "Eritrea: Electricity Service Made Available in 160 Areas," 25 January 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201101250780.html>

<sup>151</sup> Langdon D. Clough, ed., "Energy Profile of Eritrea," *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, 4 March 2007, [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy\\_profile\\_of\\_Eritrea](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy_profile_of_Eritrea)

<sup>152</sup> United Nations Forestry Department, Food and Agricultural Organization, "Chapter 2: Change Drivers: Standard of Living," in *FOSA Country Report—Eritrea*, 2001, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x6782e/X6782E03.htm#7047>

<sup>153</sup> Langdon D. Clough, ed., "Energy Profile of Eritrea," *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, 4 March 2007, [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy\\_profile\\_of\\_Eritrea](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy_profile_of_Eritrea)

exploration deal with a U.S.-based company in a renewed effort to tap potential deposits.<sup>154</sup>

### Tourism

Eritrea's coastal location, natural beauty, and host of historic sites—including Italian-era architectural gems—make it suitable for tourism. The government has made efforts to develop the industry, including cooperating with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to expand training programs for industry workers.<sup>155</sup> The government also has invested in hotels and carried out 67 projects to enhance the tourism sector.<sup>156</sup> Former residents make up the majority of the arrivals in Eritrea.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, the domestic tourism sector is growing.

However, the protracted conflict with Ethiopia and the government's strict economic and social controls have deterred most visitors and investors, and prevented the industry's growth. Today, tourist activity is mostly limited to Asmara, where hotels and services are available and crime rates are quite low, especially for the greater region. To travel outside the city, foreign visitors must apply to the government in advance, and such permits are not always granted.<sup>158</sup> Besides Asmara, services and infrastructure (such as hotels) remain limited to larger cities and are often nonexistent in rural areas, where poverty is rampant. Furthermore, land mines are still present in many areas, and political and security situations remain tense. For these reasons, tourist activity is relatively low. In 2009, tourism made up less than 2% of Eritrea's GDP.<sup>159</sup>



© Eric Lafforgue  
Sunset in Massawa

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<sup>154</sup> Reuters, "Eritrea Signs Two Off-Shore Oil Exploration Pacts," 4 October 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idUKL467813020081004>

<sup>155</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "UNDP in Eritrea: Capacity Building for Tourism Sector," n.d., <http://www.er.undp.org/governance/Tourism.html?id=92>

<sup>156</sup> All Africa, "Eritrea: Stepped Up Efforts Being Exerted to Make Nation Major Tourism Destination," 7 May 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201105090319.html>

<sup>157</sup> Ed Harris, Reuters, "Eritrea Desert Hotel First Step in Tourist Drive," Red Orbit, News, 28 October 2005, [http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/287540/eritrean\\_desert\\_hotel\\_first\\_step\\_in\\_tourism\\_drive/](http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/287540/eritrean_desert_hotel_first_step_in_tourism_drive/)

<sup>158</sup> United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Eritrea Travel Advice," 31 August 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea>

<sup>159</sup> Euromonitor International, "Travel and Tourism in Eritrea," May 2010, <http://www.euromonitor.com/travel-and-tourism-in-eritrea/report>

## Transportation

Eritrea's transportation network was initially developed during the Italian colonial era.<sup>160</sup> The nation's notable railway, which stretches approximately 306 km (190 mi) between Massawa, Asmara, and Akordat, was completed in 1932 under Italian direction.<sup>161</sup> The 30-year war for independence significantly damaged the nation's infrastructure, including the railway. After independence, the country made substantial efforts to repair and expand its transportation network, even during the 1998–2000 conflict with Ethiopia, which caused further destruction. A major focus of the “national service” and “cash-for-work” programs has been road construction.<sup>162</sup>



© Carsten ten Brink  
Children near a steam train

In 2009, the World Health Organization named Eritrea as the world's deadliest country in which to drive.<sup>163, 164, 165</sup> Pedestrians and bicyclists crowd the streets, oblivious to traffic, and drivers often ignore the speed limit.<sup>166</sup> Eritrea's streets amount to an estimated 4,010 km (2,492 mi) of roadway, only 874 km (543 mi) of which are paved. The paved sections run between major cities, most notably Asmara and Massawa; additional improvements are ongoing. Secondary roads are generally unpaved and in poor shape. Most Eritreans walk or use public transportation, which is inexpensive. Taxis are widely available and also inexpensive. Roads into Ethiopia remain closed because of the ongoing dispute.

As of 2010, the railway was in limited operation—mostly for tourist travel from Asmara.<sup>167, 168</sup> Of the country's 13 airports, 4 have paved runways and 3 are designated as international: Asmara, Massawa, and Assab.<sup>169</sup> Asmara is the primary transit point for international travel. The two major ports, Massawa and Assab, are functional but remain underused because of the ongoing dispute and related economic instability and

<sup>160</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea: History: Colonial Eritrea: Ruled by Italy,” 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>161</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Transportation and Telecommunication,” in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>162</sup> Edmund Sanders, “Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>163</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1111.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html)

<sup>164</sup> World Health Organization, “Global Status Report on Road Safety: Time for Action,” 2009, [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241563840\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241563840_eng.pdf)

<sup>165</sup> Rhys Blakely, “WHO Announces World's Deadliest Roads,” *Times Online* (London), 19 August 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/driving/article6801595.ece>

<sup>166</sup> Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea 2010 Crime & Safety Report,” 2010, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=9396>

<sup>167</sup> Tesfa News, “CNN: Eritrea's Railway—One of the Most Spectacular in the World,” 16 December 2010, <http://tesfanews.net/archives/654>

<sup>168</sup> Daphne Sashin, “iReport Global Challenge: Earth's Most Fascinating Places,” 15 December 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-12-15/us/global.challenge.irpt\\_1\\_climate-change-andorra-pyrenees-mountains/2?\\_s=PM:IREPORT](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-12-15/us/global.challenge.irpt_1_climate-change-andorra-pyrenees-mountains/2?_s=PM:IREPORT)

<sup>169</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea: Transportation,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

regulations. Assab, on the far southeastern coast, is isolated from most of the country's economic activity.<sup>170</sup>

### Outlook

Eritrea's economic development is contingent upon its security situation and its ability to successfully manage social problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, and low skills.<sup>171</sup>

President Isaias Afwerki has stated that the government will return to market-based economic policies when the conflict with Ethiopia has been resolved and the country has better established itself. If this were to occur, the nation would seem poised for development, particularly in its mining and tourist industries. Since the country remains in a state of neither peace nor war, however, the government's repressive social and economic policies have stifled growth and investment and caused many Eritreans to seek refuge abroad. The primary goal for much of the remaining population is mere subsistence, as food shortages and agricultural instability remain pressing issues.



© Charles Roffey  
Boys play soccer in an Asmara street

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<sup>170</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Transportation and Telecommunication," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>171</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

## Chapter 3 Assessment

1. The majority of Eritreans work in manufacturing.  
**False**  
Approximately 80% of Eritrea's population continues to work in agriculture.
2. Despite the country's need for imports, food and fuel are readily available throughout most areas of Eritrea.  
**False**  
Ration coupons are used to obtain necessities from government-run stores, and lines for bread, milk, and cooking fuel are common.
3. Eritrea's largely unexploited mineral deposits have created significant interest among international mining companies.  
**True**  
Eritrea's largely unexploited deposits of gold, copper, silver, iron ore and other minerals have attracted companies from Australia, Canada, China, India, Libya, and the United Kingdom.
4. As a result of World Bank funding, Eritrea now supplies electricity to all its citizens.  
**False**  
The World Bank has provided funds to improve and expand the electrical grid, but electricity supply still does not extend to most of the country's remote areas.
5. A major focus of the "national service" and "cash-for-work" programs has been road construction.  
**True**  
Eritrea's transportation network was significantly damaged during the years of conflict with Ethiopia. Thus, a major focus of the "national service" and "cash-for-work" programs has been road construction.

## Chapter 4 Society

### Introduction

Although it was recognized and often administered as a distinct region, Eritrea endured generations of foreign occupation and Ethiopian control before emerging as a self-governed nation in 1993. This hard-fought independence has engendered a deep aspiration for self-determination, which the government has reinforced to promote national identity.



© Carsten ten Brink  
Cathedral in Keren

In recent years, Eritrea has emphasized a domestic and foreign policy of “self-reliance” in an attempt to limit foreign aid and influence. The government’s “cash-for-work” and national service programs have been tied to this policy, as well as its tight economic controls and ready military defenses. But this approach has been questioned by many foreign observers, because poverty remains rampant and government repression and human rights abuses have been widely reported.<sup>172</sup> Taking into account the government’s strict controls and heavy militarization, Eritrea’s proud independence has more recently been described as a “bunker mentality” that has isolated it and driven away large numbers of citizens.<sup>173</sup>

The notion of Eritrean identity serves to unite numerous ethnic groups, which have their own cultural traditions. Many regions are characterized by specific ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliations. The society remains largely rural and agricultural, with stark differences between urban and provincial areas. For example, Asmara’s Italian-era architecture and modern services contrast sharply with the traditional structures and conditions of rural villages. Because of economic conditions and the ongoing border dispute, subsisting on limited resources remains a constant struggle and helps to bond the people of Eritrea.

### Ethnic Groups

The population comprises nine recognized ethnic groups: the Tigrinya, Tigré, Saho, Bilen, Kunama, Rashaida, Beni Amir, Nera, and Afar (Danakil). The Tigrinya make up approximately 55% of the population and benefit politically and economically from being the largest group. Most are Orthodox Christians and primarily occupy the highlands of the country, while all the other groups live mostly in lowland areas. Historically,



© Eric Lafforgue  
Afar women and children, Dahlak Islands

<sup>172</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119000.htm>

<sup>173</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, “Resentment and Rations as Eritrea Nears a Crisis,” *New York Times*, 16 October 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/16/world/africa/16eritrea.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/16/world/africa/16eritrea.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2)

disputes over land and natural resources have bred conflict between the highland and lowland groups.<sup>174, 175</sup>

The Tigré, the second-largest ethnic group, are roughly 30% of the population. Predominantly Muslim, they live in the northern hills and lowlands and work primarily as animal herders; some are nomadic.<sup>176</sup>

The Saho live along the central Red Sea coast and on the escarpment and inland areas southeast of Asmara. They make up roughly 4% of the population and are predominantly Muslim. Most tend animals, although those living at higher elevations may practice subsistence agriculture.<sup>177, 178</sup>

The Bilen, Kunama, and Rashaida, each make up about 2% of the population. The Bilen, Muslims and Christians, live in the Keren region of the central highlands and may work in agriculture or animal husbandry. The Kunama also work as agriculturalists, often on communal plots of land, and live in the southwest between the Gash and Setit rivers.<sup>179</sup> They are Christians, Muslims, and animists (worshippers of spirits and ancestors). The Rashaida are a tight-knit group of Arabic-speaking Muslims whose members are not allowed to marry outside the clan. They live in the northern lowlands near the Sudanese border and along the coast, where they raise livestock and engage in nomadic pastoralism.<sup>180</sup>

Together, four other ethnic groups—the Beni Amir, Beja, Nera, and Afar—make up 5% of the population. The Beni Amir and Beja tribes are often classified together; they live in the northwestern lowlands near Sudan and engage primarily in pastoralism. The Beni Amir are traditionally camel breeders. The Nera, who are predominantly Muslim farmers, live in the Barka Valley north of the Kunama tribe.

The Afar (also known as the Danakil) inhabit the southeastern coastal plains, where the tribe's affiliations extend into Ethiopia and Djibouti.<sup>181</sup> Although mostly Muslim, the Afar retain some traditional religious practices. They subsist primarily as nomadic pastoralists amid the hot and inhospitable conditions of the Danakil region. Traditionally

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<sup>174</sup> EveryCulture, "Eritrea: Ethnic Relations," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Eritrea.html>

<sup>175</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea: Society," September 2005, 6, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>176</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Society," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, 6, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>177</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Society," in *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, 6, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>178</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Population," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 300–302.

<sup>179</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>180</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Population," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 300–302.

<sup>181</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The People: Language Groups," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

known as fierce warriors, Afar men can be identified by their curved knives; some Afar may have sharpened teeth.<sup>182</sup>

### Languages

Because of its ethnic diversity, Eritrea is a multilingual society. Many citizens have a working knowledge of two or more languages. Under British rule in the early 1950s, Tigrinya, Arabic, and English were in use. In 1952, Tigrinya and Arabic became the official languages when Ethiopia adopted Eritrea as a federated territory.<sup>183</sup> The national language of Ethiopia, Amharic, took precedence by 1956 when it became the official language and was subsequently introduced in Eritrean elementary schools.<sup>184</sup>



© Eric Lafforgue  
Men in Massawa

Today, Tigrinya and Arabic are considered the two national languages of Eritrea. They are the working languages of government and the most commonly spoken languages for official business, commerce, and primary education. Tigrinya, which is derived from the ancient Aksumite language Ge'ez, is particularly dominant in the central plateau region and nearby northcentral Ethiopia, where ethnic Tigrinya people also live.<sup>185</sup> English, which is the language of instruction in educational facilities above the elementary level, is also widely used and understood. Italian, a legacy of the colonial era, is another language commonly used in business.

In addition to the Tigrinya, other ethnic groups have their own languages, which include Tigré, Saho, Afar, Bilen, Kunama, Nera, and Bedawi.<sup>186</sup> Amharic, the principal Ethiopian language, continues to be spoken, mainly in rural areas of Eritrea.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Population," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 300–302.

<sup>183</sup> Tekle M. Woldemikael, "Language, Education, and Public Policy in Eritrea," *African Studies Review* (1 April 2003), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-684927961.html>

<sup>184</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>185</sup> UCLA Center for World Languages, Language Materials Project, "Language Profile: Tigrinya," n.d., <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=18&menu=004>

<sup>186</sup> Raymond G. Gordon Jr., ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World: Eritrea*, 15th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2005), [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=ER](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=ER)

<sup>187</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Ethiopia: People: Ethnic Groups and Languages," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/194084/Ethiopia>

## Religions

Islam and Christianity are the main religions in Eritrea. Although official data is unavailable, the population is thought to be divided almost evenly between Muslims and Christians. The vast majority of Eritrean Muslims practice the Sunni form of Islam. Sufis, who follow a mystical form of the religion, are a minority.<sup>188</sup> Most Christians belong to the Eritrean Orthodox Church, an offshoot of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There also are small communities of Roman Catholics and Protestants. Other religious minorities include Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'is.<sup>189</sup> Indigenous religions, including animism, are practiced among certain ethnic groups, particularly the Kunama.



© Eric Lafforgue  
Women praying in Asmara

By region, Christianity is dominant on the southcentral plateau, while Islam is more common in the surrounding western and eastern lowlands and coastal areas. Historically, this pattern has corresponded to the division between the agriculturalists of the highlands and the pastoralists of the lowlands, who have long competed for resources. Religious differences have accentuated the divide between the groups.<sup>190</sup>

Although freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed, the constitution has yet to be implemented. In 2002, the government instituted a law requiring all religious groups to register with the state. Since then, the government has officially recognized only four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Sunni Muslim community. Members of other faiths have faced severe discrimination and restrictions—detainment, abuse, torture, and forced recantations of faith.

In particular, the Jehovah's Witnesses have been discriminated against because of their objection to military service, which is not protected by law. Reflecting the government's emphasis on national service, President Isaias Afwerki stated that the Jehovah's Witnesses had "forsaken their nationality" in refusing to comply with the draft. The government also has strictly regulated the recognized religious organizations, whose clergy often have been drafted into the national service program.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Religion," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 302–303.

<sup>189</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," *2008 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 19 September 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108367.htm>

<sup>190</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: The People: Religions," 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

<sup>191</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," *2008 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 19 September 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108367.htm>

## Gender Issues

### *Independence Movement*

In addition to unifying its diverse ethnic groups, Eritrea's struggle for independence promoted greater gender equality. More than one-third of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) forces were women, the majority of whom fought in the guerrilla war, and some filled leadership positions.<sup>192</sup> In doing so, they faced unique challenges, including the potential of being raped by enemy soldiers. Furthermore, many of them married and gave birth between rounds of fighting. Their commitment and courage led many counterparts to describe them as the "moral backbone" of the resistance army.<sup>193</sup>



© sheffpixie/ flickr.com  
Girls study English

Movements for gender equality arose out of the larger struggle for independence. One pro-equality group, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), was initially founded in 1979 as an arm of the EPLF. Claiming in its 2009 platform statement to be an independent nongovernmental organization (NGO) with about 200,000 members, the NUEW remains concerned with the rights and status of women in the country. In recent years it has developed numerous programs to promote women's education and access to credit.<sup>194</sup> The U.S. Department of State lists the NUEW as a quasi-governmental agency concerned with health and welfare. Whether the NUEW can operate freely, as the group claims, is questionable because the government of President Isaias Afwerki has restricted NGOs since 2005.<sup>195</sup>

### *Post-Independence*

After independence, the nation's new constitution (and other measures) officially afforded women comprehensive equal rights, concerning legal protection from discrimination, access to education, property rights, and the right to initiate divorce. Women also received a guaranteed 30% representation in parliament, with the opportunity of contesting for additional seats.<sup>196</sup> These measures have allegedly given Eritrean women significantly greater rights than women in most other African nations.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Cathy Green and Sally Baden, "Gender Profile of the State of Eritrea," *Bridge (Development—Gender)* (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex) 22 (February 1994), 10, <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re22c.pdf>

<sup>193</sup> Jennifer Parmelee, "Eritrean Women Who Fought in Trenches Now Battle Tradition," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1993, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/eritrea/stories/women062593.htm>

<sup>194</sup> The National Union of Eritrean Women, "About NUEW," 2009, <http://www.nuew.org/aboutnuew/>

<sup>195</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154345.htm>

<sup>196</sup> NUEW News, The National Union of Eritrean Women, "Achievements and Rights in Relation to Legal Documents," 29 April 2007, <http://www.nuew.org/nuew-news/eritrean-women-achievements-and-rights-in-relation-to-legal-documents/>

<sup>197</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Women in Eritrea," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 303.

But because of traditional attitudes and practices, as well as the policies of Isaias Afwerki's government (most notably its failure to implement the constitution), the rights of Eritrean women have not always been observed. Today, women in Eritrea generally retain a lower status than men, especially in rural areas, and they face many specific challenges (e.g., fewer opportunities for education and skilled employment).<sup>198</sup> They also are prone to unique health risks associated with pregnancy, childbirth (which often occurs inside the home), and the cultural practice of female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>199</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
Women in Barentu

Although in 2007 the government banned FGM, which involves varying degrees of female circumcision, up to 90% of the female population had undergone the procedure before the recent elimination of the practice from urban areas. FGM traditionally has carried various social and economic implications for women, including determining their worth for marriage.<sup>200</sup> Eritrean women also face domestic violence, and there have been reports that women enrolled in the national service program were sexually abused.<sup>201</sup>

### Traditional Dress

Modes of dress vary according to location and ethnic group. In cities, Western clothing is common for men and women; this may include suits, pants, blouses, dresses, jeans, and t-shirts. In rural areas, clothing styles are more traditional, and certain types of dress or grooming habits are associated with specific groups. In the predominantly Christian highlands, Tigrinya women traditionally wear white cotton dresses with decorative hemlines and matching white shawls. The dresses are often wraps made from a single large piece of fabric. Men may wear white pants and a long white shirt that reaches to the knees, as well as a shawl around the shoulders. Such garments are often worn on ceremonial occasions. Tigrinya women also are known for their unique braided hairstyles.<sup>202</sup>



© Charles Roffey  
Mother and son in southern Eritrea

<sup>198</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154345.htm>

<sup>199</sup> IRIN—Integrated Regional Information Networks, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Eritrea: Humanitarian Country Profile," March 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/country.aspx?CountryCode=ER&RegionCode=HOA>

<sup>200</sup> Jack Kimball, "Eritrean Custom Stronger than Law on Cutting Girls," Reuters AlertNet, 11 June 2007, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L16123645.htm>

<sup>201</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154345.htm>

<sup>202</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Population," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 300–302.

In Muslim communities, women typically wear wrap dresses and head scarves, which together may cover most of their bodies, including their hair. Men usually wear a knee-length shirt over pants, often with a vest and a knit cap or turban. Some may wear wraps or sarongs. Rashaida women are known for their red and black robes displaying geometric patterns. They also wear veils, which typically are black and may be embroidered. Bilen women can be identified by their colorful wraps, and their nose rings made from precious metals. Some groups wear tattoos or practice scarification. For example, a pattern of three vertical scars on each side of the face is associated with members of the Beni Amir and Nara groups.<sup>203</sup> Many Eritrean women also wear henna designs on their hands and feet.

Broadly, a symbol of Eritrean identity and independence is the Shida sandal. Made from black plastic, the Shida was worn by Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) forces during the struggle for independence. The shoes became popular with the fighters because they were cheap, breathable, and easy to repair (by melting any broken pieces together again). Thus, although they lacked official uniforms, resistance fighters could be recognized by their Shida sandals. Today, a large metal sculpture of a pair of Shidas serves as a war memorial in Asmara.<sup>204</sup>

### The Arts

Eritrean folk arts involve community participation and are an important social practice that carry and preserve the traditions of the people. Each of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups has an oral tradition of storytelling, as well as its own music, dance, arts, and crafts. Eritreans celebrate their heritage at major festivals, with musical and dramatic dance performances. Likewise, all social events—whether they celebrate communal traditions or individual life events (such as marriage)—are accompanied by music and/or dance. Traditional musical instruments include the *krar* and *wata* (both stringed instruments), *shambko* (flutes of various lengths), and the *embilta* (a reedy-sounding horn).



© Eric Lafforgue  
Woman cooking

Orthodox Christian churches are decorated with the artwork of painters dating to the 14th century. In urban areas, paintings that evoke social and political messages are common and should not be mistaken for graffiti. Themes of religion and liberation tended to dominate the performing arts until recently, when modern improvisational works became more commonplace.<sup>205</sup>

Ceramic pottery is another important form.<sup>206</sup> This includes clay pots called *tsahli*, which are designed for the spicy stews served on festive occasions; large ceramic water pots

<sup>203</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, "Eritrea: The Culture: Population," in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 300–302.

<sup>204</sup> Marc Lacey, "For Eritrean Guerrillas, War Was Hell (and Calluses)," *New York Times*, 2 May 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/02/world/for-eritrean-guerrillas-war-was-hell-and-calluses.html>

<sup>205</sup> Embassy of the State of Eritrea, New Delhi, India, "The Arts/Crafts," 7 October 2008, <http://www.eritreambindia.com/culture.htm>

known as *utro*, common in rural areas; and *djebena* pots, which are used in the traditional Eritrean coffee ceremony.

Other locally crafted items include woven baskets, which are used for serving and storing food. Woodcarving is another important trade and pastime. Eritreans use pale-colored olive wood to make a variety of household products, such as bowls, stools, tables, and chairs, as well as saddles for camels. Another local art form, jewelry, is designed in distinct styles across Eritrean ethnic groups. Gold and silver are fashioned into necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and rings. Orthodox crosses, made of silver or other metals, are common in urban and rural areas.<sup>207</sup>

### Cuisine

Reflecting the country's agricultural base, Eritrean cuisine is founded largely on grains, legumes (peas or beans), and meats and other animal products. Despite the country's location on the bountiful Red Sea, fish is less readily consumed, although some groups incorporate it into their diet. Italian cuisine is also popular, especially in urban areas where the colonial legacy is more pronounced.

An essential feature of Eritrean meals is a type of bread known as *injera*, or *taita* in Tigrinya. Typically made from the native grain *teff*, *injera* is a flat, spongy pancake that is used as either a base or complement to the meal. Another common type of bread is *kitcha*, a thin, unleavened variety usually made from wheat.<sup>208</sup>

Main dishes usually consist of meat stews or porridges, depending upon location and availability. A basic slow-cooked, spicy stew made with meat and/or vegetables is known as *tsebhi*. A similar stew, known as *zigni*, may be spicier. A fiery combination of red pepper spices known as *berbere* is used in these stews and in many sauces. *Zigni* usually includes lamb, beef, or goat.

Other meat dishes include *tibsi* (sliced lamb cooked with butter, onion, and garlic), *capretto* (roasted goat), and *gored gored* (*berbere*-spiced beef). Fish, often charcoal-baked, is more frequently found in coastal areas such as Massawa. Meatless sauces include a lentil curry called *alicha* and a chickpea porridge known as *shiro*.<sup>209</sup> Various Italian dishes—including lasagna, spaghetti, and pizza—are served in restaurants, especially in Asmara. Likewise, Italian espressos, macchiatos, and cappuccinos



© Carsten ten Brink  
Spicy chickpea dish

<sup>206</sup> Embassy of the State of Eritrea, New Delhi, India, "The Arts/Crafts," 7 October 2008, <http://www.eritreambindia.com/culture.htm>

<sup>207</sup> Embassy of the State of Eritrea, New Delhi, India, "The Arts/Crafts," 7 October 2008, <http://www.eritreambindia.com/culture.htm>

<sup>208</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzehaie, "Eritrean Cuisine," Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-cuisine.htm>

<sup>209</sup> Michael DeGeronimo and Angela Boskovitch, eds., "Tradition and Modernity in Eritrea," Food Travels, 2007, [http://www.food-travels.com/index.php?id=44&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=18&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=33](http://www.food-travels.com/index.php?id=44&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=18&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=33)

complement traditional beverages (e.g., sweet black tea, coffee, yogurt, milk, and, in cities, fruit juices).<sup>210</sup>

An integral part of Eritrean culture, the coffee ceremony entails a ritual-like process. First, the coffee beans are washed and roasted while guests sit and enjoy the aroma. Next, the beans are crushed and mixed with water in a *djebena* pot (a slender-necked pot), which is then heated on a hot charcoal stove. Guests are served the freshly brewed coffee in small cups with sugar, accompanied by snacks such as popcorn. Decorum requires guests to remain for the hour long ceremony, and those who honor the host by drinking three cups are invited to return another time.<sup>211</sup>

### Sport & Recreation

By most accounts, cycling is the national sport. The Italians introduced it during the colonial era, and the first Giro d'Eritrea, or Tour of Eritrea, was held in 1946 while under British administration. Locals were not allowed to participate in the race. But in 2001, independent Eritrea resumed the annual Tour tradition, which today features approximately 100 professional cyclists and thousands of amateur riders and enthusiasts. In its current form, the Tour of Eritrea is 1,100 km (685 mi) long in 10 stages, including a challenging climb from coastal Massawa to the highland city of Asmara—a rise of 2,400 m (7,875 ft).<sup>212</sup> The Tour is the largest and most popular of many organized cycling events, and is known for its unique challenges, including intense heat, roaming camels, and “rock-throwing baboons.” Apart from local contests, the Tour de France is one of the most popular televised events for Eritrean spectators; it is broadcast live on government-run television.<sup>213</sup>



© Eric Lafforgue  
Boy in Asmara

Football (soccer) is also popular in Eritrea. The country has organized leagues for various levels of play, with the highest being the Eritrean Premier League. Football's accessibility to the general population stems from the minimal equipment required. It is thus played by the poorest youth, even when resources are limited. For example, children may use a makeshift ball—such as one made from compressed cotton—and they may play in the street rather than on a field.<sup>214</sup> Football is also a major spectator sport; national and international matches are televised in Eritrea. The national team, known as the Red Sea Boys, has participated in several international contests, including the African Cup of

<sup>210</sup> Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, “Eritrea: The Culture: Food and Drink,” in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 3rd ed. (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 306–308.

<sup>211</sup> Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzahaie, “Eritrean Cuisine,” Eritrea.be, 1998–2011, <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-cuisine.htm>

<sup>212</sup> Nicolas Germain, Agence France Presse, “Unusual Challenges at the Tour of Eritrea,” VeloNews, 19 February 2006, <http://velonews.com/article/9516>

<sup>213</sup> Xan Rice, *Observer*, “Riders on the Sandstorm,” *Guardian*, 30 July 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2006/jul/30/features.sport7>

<sup>214</sup> Cultural Profiles Project, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Eritrea: Sports and Recreation,” 2002, <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/eritrea/sports.html>

Nations, the continent's major tournament. But its national team did not participate in World Cup qualifying for 2010, reportedly because of problems within the country's governing football organization.<sup>215</sup>

There are numerous traditional games as well. A strategy game called *gebeta*, known elsewhere as *mandala*, is played with dried peas and, ideally, a wooden board with two rows of sunken compartments. The goal of the game is to amass the most peas by redistributing them from one compartment to the others. Camel racing is also popular among ethnic groups in the northern lowlands.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, girls in Eritrea enjoy a hop-and-skip singing game called *fti fti*. Other children's games include *handai*, which is similar to jacks.

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<sup>215</sup> *BBC Sport*, "Eritrea Confirms 2010 Withdrawal," 27 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/africa/7316753.stm>

<sup>216</sup> Cultural Profiles Project, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Eritrea: Sports and Recreation," 2002, <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/eritrea/sports.html>

## Chapter 4 Assessment

1. The Tigrinya are the largest ethnic group in Eritrea.  
**True**  
Though Eritrea's population comprises nine principal ethnic groups, the Tigrinya are the largest at approximately 55% of the population.
2. Tigrinya is the sole national language of Eritrea.  
**False**  
Tigrinya and Arabic are considered the two national languages of Eritrea and are used in government, education, and official business.
3. More than one-third of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) forces were women.  
**True**  
Women often fought in the guerrilla war and some filled leadership positions. Because of their courage and commitment, they were described by their compatriots as the "moral backbone" of the resistance army.
4. The Shida sandal is a symbol of Eritrean identity and independence.  
**True**  
Cheap, breathable, and easy to repair, the black plastic Shida sandal was worn by Eritrean forces during the struggle for independence. Although they lacked official uniforms, resistance fighters were recognized by their Shida sandals, which remain popular.
5. The Afar are traditionally known as fierce warriors in Eritrea.  
**True**  
Traditionally known as fierce warriors, Afar men can be identified by their curved knives; some Afar may have sharpened teeth.

## Chapter 5 Security

### Introduction

Strategically located at a southern naval choke point on the Red Sea, the heavily militarized African country of Eritrea has been important to the security interests of numerous nations, including the United States, Great Britain, and Israel.<sup>217, 218</sup> However, foreign relations with the impoverished country have sometimes been strained because the United States, the United Nations, and the African Union believe Eritrea is abetting terrorists.<sup>219, 220</sup>



© erjkprunczyk/ flickr.com  
Flag of Eritrea

Eritrea, similarly distrustful of the West and fearing spies, in 2005 asked international humanitarian organizations to leave the country.<sup>221, 222</sup> That request came as part of the government's stated policy of self-reliance, which has led to the rejection of significant sums of foreign aid.<sup>223</sup> The policy, which has been called "isolationist" by critics, has also been cited as the force that is driving increasingly rigid measures of political, social, and economic control.<sup>224, 225</sup> Such measures have largely funneled manpower, resources, and energies toward militarization of Eritrea—a small and secretive country in the Horn of Africa that is considered "NATO's southern flank."<sup>226, 227</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Uzi Mahnaimi, "Israelis Warn of Eritrea Flashpoint," *Sunday Times*, 19 April 2009, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article6122337.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6122337.ece)

<sup>218</sup> Andrew McGregor, "Global Terrorism Analysis: Strange Days on the Red Sea Coast: A New Theater for the Israel-Iran Conflict?" *Terrorism Monitor* (The Jamestown Foundation) 7, no. 8 (3 April 2009), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=34807&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=412&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34807&tx_ttnews[backPid]=412&no_cache=1)

<sup>219</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, "Eritreans Deny American Accusations of Terrorist Ties," *New York Times*, 18 September 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/18/world/africa/18eritrea.html?ref=world>

<sup>220</sup> Africa Review, "Country Profile: Eritrea," 1 December 2009, <http://www.africareview.com/Country+Profiles/-/979196/983106/-/14c9ovhz/-/index.html>

<sup>221</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," March 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>222</sup> Daily Mail, "Four British Ex-Marines Held for Two Months in Eritrea Accused of Spying," 11 February 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1355888/Arrested-spies-British-ex-marines-held-months-Eritrea.html>

<sup>223</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.0.6539052.story>

<sup>224</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 August 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>225</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>226</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Eritrea Aspires to be Self-Reliant, Rejecting Foreign Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-eritrea2oct02.1.2576926.story>

<sup>227</sup> David A. Anderson and Randall D. McCauley, "Ideology or Pragmatism? U.S. Economic Aid, Military Assistance, and Foreign Military Sales: 1950–2007," *Strategic Insights* 8, no. 3 (August 2009), <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2009/Aug/andersonAug09.html>

The single-party government of Eritrea—led by former Marxist rebel President Isaias Afwerki—has consolidated power and cracked down on internal criticism.<sup>228</sup> Numerous dissidents and journalists have disappeared, including several government officials and correspondents for major news organizations. Government detention centers and prisons have been charged with abuse.<sup>229, 230, 231</sup> Foreign travel has continued to be restricted for much of the population, and military conscription has remained in effect.<sup>232</sup> Unresolved border disputes also threaten the security of this region, which is prone to instability.<sup>233, 234, 235</sup> A plot to bomb the Ethiopian capital in January 2011 that was blamed on the Eritrean government has led to calls for even tougher UN sanctions, which were initially imposed after the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia.<sup>236</sup>

Because Eritrea has been closed to outsiders and the local media is government-controlled, independent information about Eritrea is unavailable. As a result, Eritrea has been described as an informational “black hole” by Susan Rice, the United States ambassador to the United Nations.<sup>237, 238</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>229</sup> Amnesty International, “Eritrea: You Have No Right to Ask—Government Resists Scrutiny on Human Rights,” 18 May 2004, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR64/003/2004/en/e3202b2b-d5f6-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/afr640032004en.html>

<sup>230</sup> Reuters, “Rights Group Condemns Eritrea over Detentions,” 16 April 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSLF80172.CH.2400>

<sup>231</sup> Refugees International, “Ethiopia-Eritrea: Stalemate Takes Toll on Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin,” 30 May 2008, <http://www.refintl.org/policy/field-report/ethiopia-eritrea-stalemate-takes-toll-eritreans-and-ethiopians-eritrean-origin>

<sup>232</sup> Reuters, “Rights Group Condemns Eritrea over Detentions,” 16 April 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/04/16/idUSLF80172.CH.2400>

<sup>233</sup> United Nations, Security Council, “Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Eritrea Over its Role in Somalia, Refusal to Withdraw Troops Following Conflict with Djibouti,” 23 December 2009, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9833.doc.htm>

<sup>234</sup> United Nations News Center, “Security Council Welcomes Agreement Between Eritrea and Djibouti to End Border Dispute,” 11 June 2010, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35005&Cr=djibouti&Cr1>

<sup>235</sup> *BBC News*, “Eritrea May Become Failed State, Warns Think Tank,” 22 September 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11389426>

<sup>236</sup> Flavia Krause-Jackson and Bill Varner, “UN Council Asked to Target Eritrea with Sanctions on Mining,” *Bloomberg*, 4 August 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-04/un-said-to-consider-hitting-eritrea-with-sanctions-on-mining.html>

<sup>237</sup> Barry Hillenbrand, “Famine in Eritrea: A Mirage or a Disaster?” *The Herald* (Returned Peace Corps volunteers), 12 September 2011, <http://eandeherald.com/2011/09/12/eritrean-news/>

<sup>238</sup> Amnesty International, “Eritrea: You Have No Right to Ask—Government Resists Scrutiny on Human Rights,” 18 May 2004, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR64/003/2004/en/e3202b2b-d5f6-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/afr640032004en.html>

## United States–Eritrea Relations

After the Eritrean resistance movement liberated the region from Ethiopia in 1991, the United States opened a consulate in Asmara in August 1992.<sup>239</sup> In April 1993, following an Eritrean referendum on independence, the United States officially recognized the country as an autonomous and self-governing nation. The United States and Eritrea established diplomatic relations two months later.<sup>240</sup> Over the next few



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Abandoned tank

years, the United States offered small aid packages to Eritrea while attempting to promote democracy and economic liberalization there. But the two governments soon disagreed about U.S. food aid because Eritrea planned to sell its donated food supplies at discounted rates, to raise money for other development programs. The U.S. temporarily withheld food aid in 1996 because of this policy disagreement, but it later disbursed the aid to prevent hunger.<sup>241</sup>

In cooperation with the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and the European Union (EU), the United States played an active role in negotiating a ceasefire during the 1998–2000 conflict with Ethiopia.<sup>242</sup> In doing so, the U.S. committed to providing further humanitarian aid, and it supported the work of the two major entities formed to resolve the boundary dispute: the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). The EEBC’s subsequent ruling on the demarcation of the boundary, which allotted disputed territory to Eritrea, was rejected by Ethiopia, and the conflict remained at an impasse.

In fiscal year 2004, the United States gave more than USD 65 million in aid to Eritrea.<sup>243</sup> However in 2005, the Eritrean government stated that it was “uncomfortable” with the activities of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) office in Asmara, and it asked the organization to cease operations within the country. Many observers interpreted the move as the Eritrean government’s response to what it viewed as a failure of the United States to encourage Ethiopia (a strong U.S. ally) to accept the

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<sup>239</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Ethiopia,” January 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm>

<sup>240</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>241</sup> Dan Connell, “Eritrea,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (Interhemispheric Resource Center and Institute for Policy Studies) 2, no. 45 (September 1997), <http://www.fpif.org/reports/eritrea>

<sup>242</sup> John Prendergast, “Special Report No. 74: U.S. Leadership in Resolving African Conflict: The Case of Ethiopia–Eritrea,” United States Institute of Peace, 7 September 2001, <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr74.pdf>

<sup>243</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

ruling of the EEBC.<sup>244</sup> Officially, the U.S. government has “fully supported” the ruling, a decision that it considers “final” and “binding.”<sup>245</sup>

### *Recent Events*

The United States’ relations with Eritrea have since been strained. The United States continues to provide substantial aid to Ethiopia, which the United States considers a “strategic partner” in international efforts to combat terrorism.<sup>246</sup> In late 2006, the United States supported Ethiopia’s invasion of Somalia to oust the ruling Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) (also known as the Islamic Courts Union), an extremist Islamist movement that the United States linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist network and the related al-Shabaab organization.<sup>247</sup> A United Nations group subsequently reported that the Eritrean government was giving military aid to Islamist insurgent groups in Somalia. These groups have tried to overthrow Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which replaced the CIC and which Ethiopia and the United States supported.<sup>248</sup> Although the Eritrean government denied these accusations, in 2007 the United States threatened to designate it a state sponsor of terrorism.<sup>249</sup>



© WFP/Guido Votano  
Unloading cereal in Eritrea

That same year, the United States closed the Eritrean consulate in Oakland, CA after the Eritrean government imposed various restrictions on U.S. diplomatic officials in Asmara. Eritrea denied such claims. The closure was considered a significant setback for Eritrea because of the consulate’s role in collecting income taxes from expatriate Eritreans in California.<sup>250</sup> In May 2008, the U.S. Department of State designated Eritrea “as a country that is not fully cooperating with U.S. antiterrorism efforts.”<sup>251</sup> In May 2009, U.S. officials described reports of ongoing Eritrean support of insurgent forces in Somalia as

<sup>244</sup> Agence France Presse, “Eritrea Rejects US Appeals to Reverse Ban on USAID,” Relief Web, 31 August 2005, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/FPRI-6FSB39?OpenDocument>

<sup>245</sup> Embassy of the United States, Asmara, Eritrea, U.S. Department of State, “Summary of Question and Answer Session, April 12 Town Hall Meeting with Ambassador Scott H. DeLisi, U.S. Embassy Asmara,” 12 April 2007, [http://eritrea.usembassy.gov/townhall\\_meet\\_amb.html](http://eritrea.usembassy.gov/townhall_meet_amb.html)

<sup>246</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Ethiopia,” January 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm>

<sup>247</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*, “Chapter 2: Country Reports: Africa Overview: Ethiopia,” 30 April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122412.htm>

<sup>248</sup> Terrence Lyons, “Lyons: Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict Fueling Somalia Crisis” (interviewed by Bernard Gwertzman), Council on Foreign Relations, 22 August 2007, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/14074/lyons.html>

<sup>249</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, “Eritreans Deny American Accusations of Terrorists Ties,” *New York Times*, 18 September 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/18/world/africa/18eritrea.html>

<sup>250</sup> *BBC News*, “US Moves to Shut Eritrean Mission,” 13 August 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6944846.stm>

<sup>251</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, “Chapter 2: Country Reports: Africa Overview: Eritrea,” *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*, 30 April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122412.htm>

“credible” and “very disturbing.”<sup>252</sup> Denying the allegations, Eritrea continues to fault the United States for Ethiopia’s noncompliance with the EEBC ruling.

## Relations with Neighboring Countries

### *Ethiopia*

After World War II, the British administered Eritrea until it entered a UN-supported federation with Ethiopia in 1952. After Ethiopia officially annexed Eritrea in 1962, the Eritrean people mobilized a decades-long insurgency against Ethiopian forces—a struggle ultimately won by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1991.<sup>253</sup>



© Eric Lafforgue  
Afar fighters

Relations between the two countries were normalized in 1991, and strong economic ties developed. However, a border dispute in 1997 led to war when, in May 1998, Eritrean troops moved into the region surrounding Badme, a small town on the Eritrean–Ethiopian boundary.<sup>254, 255</sup> During the conflict, characterized by brutal trench fighting and aerial bombing, both countries expelled tens of thousands of civilians associated with the other side, while many others fled.<sup>256, 257</sup> The war continued until the signing of a peace treaty in 2000.<sup>258, 259, 260, 261</sup> Tensions lingered because the border issue remained unresolved, leading to United Nations’ involvement. Subsequently, the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) provided peacekeeping

<sup>252</sup> *BBC News*, “US Alarmed at Eritrea ‘Arms Link,’” 16 May 2009,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8053078.stm>

<sup>253</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005,

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>254</sup> Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut, “The War Between Ethiopia and Eritrea,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (Interhemispheric Resource Center and Institute for Policy Studies) 5, no. 25 (August 2000),

<http://www.fpiif.org/pdf/vol5/25IFERitEthiop.pdf>

<sup>255</sup> Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, “Conflict Profile: Ethiopia–Eritrea Interstate War (1998–2000),” 1 May 2008,

<http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/Ethiopia2.pdf>

<sup>256</sup> *BBC News*, “Border a Geographer’s Nightmare,” 12 May 2000,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/396571.stm>

<sup>257</sup> Refugees International, “Ethiopia–Eritrea: Stalemate Takes Toll on Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin,” 5 May 2008, <http://www.refintl.org/policy/field-report/ethiopia-eritrea-stalemate-takes-toll-eritreans-and-ethiopians-eritrea-origin>

<sup>258</sup> Fiona Lortan, “Africa Watch: The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict: A Fragile Peace,” *African Security Review* (Institute for Security Studies) 9, no. 4 (2000), <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/asr/9No4/Lortan.html>

<sup>259</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009,

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>260</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005,

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>261</sup> Global Security.org, “Military: Ethiopia/Eritrea War,” 2000–2009,

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/eritrea.htm>

forces to patrol a 25-km-wide buffer (the “Temporary Security Zone”) along the border.<sup>262</sup>

As part of the peace process, Eritrea and Ethiopia agreed in advance to abide by a UN ruling on the border demarcation, which initially was decided in favor of Eritrea in 2003; however, Ethiopia rejected the ruling.<sup>263</sup> During this time, the Eritrean government cut off its fuel supplies to UN forces, which then officially pulled out of the border zone in July 2008.<sup>264</sup> However, Ethiopia has kept forces within the disputed area, which remains heavily militarized.<sup>265, 266, 267, 268</sup> Tens of thousands of regional inhabitants remain displaced.<sup>269</sup>

In August 2009, the UN’s Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission finalized the awards Eritrea and Ethiopia must pay each other for damages inflicted during the 1998–2000 border war. The issue has not been resolved, and there were border incidents throughout 2009 and 2010.<sup>270</sup> In July 2011, the UN accused Eritrea of plotting a bomb attack on Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, during the January 2011 African Union summit.<sup>271, 272</sup> While the plot was thwarted, the incident led Ethiopia to support the efforts of opposition groups to overthrow the Eritrean president.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>263</sup> Reuters AlertNet, “Eritrea–Ethiopia Border: In Detail,” 3 June 2008, [http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE\\_BOR.htm?v=in\\_detail](http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE_BOR.htm?v=in_detail)

<sup>264</sup> IRIN—Integrated Regional Information Networks, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ethiopia–Eritrea: Urgent Need for Dialogue after Departure of UNMEE, Says Analyst,” 1 August 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=79573>

<sup>265</sup> Reuters AlertNet, “Eritrea–Ethiopia Border: Timeline,” 3 June 2008, [http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE\\_BOR.htm?v=timeline](http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE_BOR.htm?v=timeline)

<sup>266</sup> Voice of America News, “UN Troops in Eritrea Move to Capital,” 20 February 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2008-02-20-voa32.html>

<sup>267</sup> Peter Martell, “Not So Fond Farewell to Eritrea,” *BBC News*, 10 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7283293.stm>

<sup>268</sup> Terrence Lyons, “Lyons: Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict Fueling Somalia Crisis” (interviewed by Bernard Gwertzman), Council on Foreign Relations, 22 August 2007, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/14074/lyons.html>

<sup>269</sup> Reuters AlertNet, “Eritrea–Ethiopia Border: In Detail,” 3 June 2008, [http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE\\_BOR.htm?v=in\\_detail](http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/EE_BOR.htm?v=in_detail)

<sup>270</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK, “Subsaharan Africa: Eritrea,” 1 August 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea>

<sup>271</sup> *BBC News*, “UN Report Accuses Eritrea of Plotting to Bomb AU Summit,” 28 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14335752>

<sup>272</sup> Voice of America, “UN Report Says Eritrea Planned Attack on AU Summit,” 29 July 2011, <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2011/07/29/un-report-says-eritrea-planned-attack-on-au-summit/>

<sup>273</sup> Aaron Maasho, “Refile—Ethiopia Says to Work for Eritrea ‘Regime Change,’” Reuters Africa, 21 April 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/eritreaNews/idAFLDE73K0TH20110421?sp=true>

## *Djibouti*

The small country to the south of Eritrea maintains strong security ties with its former colonial power, France. It also is a regional ally of the U.S., which operates a military base outside the capital.<sup>274</sup> The United States had been lobbied by Eritrea to house the base in its territory, but the United States reportedly selected Djibouti because of Eritrea's unstable security situation and its hostile relationship with Ethiopia, a U.S. ally.<sup>275</sup> Like Eritrea, Djibouti's location along the Red Sea, near the Bab el Mandeb Straits, makes it strategically important, particularly for trade and counterterrorism efforts.



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Djiboutian soldiers

Eritrea's relations with Djibouti have been tense, marked by a long-running dispute over the border region of Ras Doumeria (a promontory at the mouth of the Red Sea) and a nearby island. In the early 20th century, Italy and France signed treaties that seemingly demarcated the border but left the issue of the island's sovereignty unresolved. Today, the area is home to ethnic Afar, whose tribal affiliations extend across the Eritrean, Djiboutian, and Ethiopian borders. Conflict over the region almost broke out in 1996 when Eritrea reportedly made claims to the area and occupied it with troops. The two countries temporarily resolved the matter, and despite another flare-up in 1999, they worked to repair relations.<sup>276</sup>

In 2008, conflict broke out in the Ras Doumeria region, resulting in numerous fatalities and injuries.<sup>277</sup> The skirmish reportedly occurred after Eritrean forces demanded the return of numerous fellow troops who had willingly fled across the border to Djibouti.<sup>278</sup> A UN Security Council resolution subsequently called for the withdrawal of troops from the border zone. Djibouti withdrew, but Eritrea's troops remained mobilized in the border zone until 2010. In June of that year, Eritrea and Djibouti agreed to resolve their border dispute after Qatari mediation, and Eritrea withdrew its troops from the contested areas of mainland Doumeira and the Kallida and Doumeira islands.<sup>279, 280</sup> A Qatari force is currently monitoring these areas, but a final decision on the demarcation of the border has yet to be reached.

<sup>274</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Djibouti," April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5482.htm>

<sup>275</sup> Berouk Mesfin, "Situation Report: The Eritrea–Djibouti Dispute," Institute for Security Studies, 15 September 2008, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>

<sup>276</sup> Berouk Mesfin, "Situation Report: The Eritrea–Djibouti Dispute," Institute for Security Studies, 15 September 2008, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>

<sup>277</sup> UN News Service, "Djibouti–Eritrea Border Tension Could Escalate, Warns UN Team," 18 September 2008, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28109&Cr=djibouti&Cr1=eritrea>

<sup>278</sup> Berouk Mesfin, "Situation Report: The Eritrea–Djibouti Dispute," Institute for Security Studies, 15 September 2008, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>

<sup>279</sup> Berouk Mesfin, "Situation Report: Elections, Politics and External Involvement in Djibouti," Institute for Security Studies, 14 April 2011, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/15Apr11Djibouti.pdf>

<sup>280</sup> UN Security Council Report, "Djibouti/Eritrea Historical Chronology," 1 July 2010, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/pp.aspx?c=glKWLeMTIsG&b=4282289&printmode=1>

## Sudan

Since gaining independence in 1953, Sudan has been a site of frequent and deep-seated internal conflict. The country was highly diverse yet generally divided between an Arab Muslim north and a black African south. After two civil wars (1962–1972 and 1983–2002), a permanent peace deal in 2005, and a referendum in February 2011, the south seceded from the north to become South Sudan in July 2011. During this time, continued conflict between the two cultures often spilled into neighboring countries, including Eritrea.<sup>281</sup> Likewise, Eritrea’s internal struggles often affected Sudan. During the long Eritrean war for independence, Sudan provided shelter to EPLF and other resistance forces. It also hosted large numbers of Eritreans who fled the conflict, many of whom remain in the country.<sup>282</sup>



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U.N. police officers

Following its independence, Eritrea’s relations with Sudan often have been hostile. Each country has reportedly supported insurgent or opposition groups targeting the other country’s government. In the early 1990s, Sudan’s Islamist government attempted to spread Islamism throughout the region.<sup>283</sup> It supported Eritrean Islamic Jihad, a militant insurgent group, in its cross-border activities. As a result, the two countries broke relations and closed their border in 1994. Thereafter, Eritrea allowed the National Democratic Alliance, Sudan’s opposition movement, to base its operations in Asmara.<sup>284</sup> During Eritrea’s 1998–2000 conflict, it worked to restore relations with Sudan, primarily in an attempt to offset similar efforts by its opponent, Ethiopia.<sup>285</sup> However, relations again turned hostile as Sudan accused Eritrea of supporting rebel factions in its eastern territory, and Eritrea accused Sudan of harassing and detaining Eritrean nationals in Khartoum.<sup>286</sup>

Despite these tensions, Eritrea and Sudan have since improved ties. In 2006, they reestablished diplomatic relations, which led to reopening their border to trade.<sup>287</sup> In 2008, Sudan banned Eritrean opposition groups from operating within its territory, although

<sup>281</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Sudan,” March 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5424.htm>

<sup>282</sup> Peter Woodward, “Chapter 2: Facing Sudan’s Islamist Regime,” *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 49.

<sup>283</sup> IRIN—Integrated Regional Information Networks, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Sudan: A Future without War?” March 2004, <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=22&ReportId=64279>

<sup>284</sup> Peter Woodward, “Chapter 2: Facing Sudan’s Islamist Regime,” *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 49.

<sup>285</sup> Fiona Lortan, “Africa Watch: The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict: A Fragile Peace,” *African Security Review* (Institute for Security Studies) 9, no. 4 (2000), <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/asr/9No4/Lortan.html>

<sup>286</sup> BBC News, “Eritrea–Sudan Relations Plummet,” 15 January 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3400575.stm>

<sup>287</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

Eritrea did not reciprocate.<sup>288</sup> Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged war crimes, visited Eritrea in 2009. However, the Eritrean government rejected the ICC's indictment and its request for Bashir's arrest.<sup>289</sup> In turn, Sudan has criticized the 2009 UN sanctions against Eritrea.<sup>290</sup>

### Military

Eritrea's armed forces comprise a large ground force unit and small naval and air divisions.<sup>291</sup>

The army has five major bases at Assab, Asmara, Dahlak, Massawa, and Sawa.<sup>292</sup> The navy—supported by Israeli Super Dvora MkII patrol boats and Soviet OSA II class patrol boats—is headquartered at a modern base in Massawa, with other bases in Assab and Dahlak.<sup>293, 294</sup> The air force operates bases at Asmara and Massawa.<sup>295</sup>



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Female Eritrean soldiers

In troops per capita, Eritrea is one of the most militarized countries in the world. In 2008, the World Bank estimated that 320,000 of the country's 4.7 million citizens served in the armed forces, or approximately 1 out of every 15 Eritreans.<sup>296</sup> Other estimates place this ratio at 1 in 20.<sup>297</sup> In any case, the country's armed forces are disproportionately large for its population. Although Eritrea has less than 1% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa,

<sup>288</sup> Tesfa-alem Tekle, "Eritrean Opposition Groups Call on Sudan to Lift Imposed Ban," Sudan Tribune, 9 June 2008, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article27455>

<sup>289</sup> Voice of America News, "Sudan's President Visits Eritrea Despite Warrant," 23 March 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-03/2009-03-23-voa17.cfm?CFID=188636575&CFTOKEN=53113168&jsessionid=0030a74164a5c0f8b26f314f59134c716174>

<sup>290</sup> Jeremy Clarke, "Sudan's Bashir Slams UN Sanctions on Eritrea: Media," Reuters, 6 March 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E62505Q20100306>

<sup>291</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea," in *The World Factbook*, 23 April 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

<sup>292</sup> Jane's Defence, "Eritrea: Army," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—North Africa*, 26 January 2010, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits110.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=NAFRS&keyword=](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits110.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=NAFRS&keyword=)

<sup>293</sup> Frederik Van Lukeren, "The Naval Balance of Power: The Red Sea," Geopolitical and Conflict Report (think tank), 28 February 2011, <http://gcreport.com/index.php/analysis/185-the-naval-balance-of-power-the-red-sea>

<sup>294</sup> Jane's Defence, "Eritrea: Navy," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—North Africa*, 26 January 2010, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits130.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=NAFRS&keyword=](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits130.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=NAFRS&keyword=)

<sup>295</sup> Jane's Defence, "Eritrea: Air Force," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—North Africa*, 26 January 2010, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits120.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=NAFRS&keyword=](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/nafrsu/erits120.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=tank&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=NAFRS&keyword=)

<sup>296</sup> Jack Kimball, "In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service," Reuters, 18 July 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/18/us-eritrea-military-idUSL1412475520080718>

<sup>297</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

it maintains the region's largest armed forces.<sup>298</sup> Thus, it commits significant funds and resources to military operations. The military budget as a percentage of GDP reached 6.3% in 2006—among the 10 highest percentages worldwide.<sup>299</sup>

Weaponry is primarily of Soviet-make. The army utilizes the Morozov T-54/55 as its main battle tank. It also employs BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, BTR-60/152 armored personnel carriers, and amphibious Arzamas BRDM armored reconnaissance vehicles. Artillery, anti-tank, and air defense systems are primarily of Soviet-design as well.<sup>300</sup>

Similarly, the air force relies on Soviet-era systems believed to have been acquired from former Soviet republics. With only around two dozen fixed wing aircraft, the air force is a negligible asset. Most of the aircraft are Sukhoi-27 series and MiG-29 series multirole fighters, augmented by a handful of transport and trainer aircraft. Rotary wing assets are comprised of 4 Mi-17 Hip-H transport/gunships and 4 U.S.-made Agusta-Bell 412 utility helicopters.<sup>301</sup>

The Eritrean navy is miniscule and largely incapable of conducting offensive operations. However, they are an active patrol force with sufficient assets to ward off pirates operating in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the Harena Boatyard near Assab is producing new craft for domestic use and export.<sup>302</sup>

### *National Service*

The military fills its ranks through a mandatory national service program that requires all capable Eritreans from ages 18–40 to perform 12 to 18 months of service. Within this age range, men 18–40 and childless women 18–27 either actively serve in the military or work in civil service/development programs.<sup>303, 304, 305</sup> On the civil side of the program, national service may include work in schools, government facilities,



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Man in refugee camp

<sup>298</sup> Jack Kimball, “In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service,” Reuters, 18 July 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/18/us-eritrea-military-idUSL1412475520080718>

<sup>299</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Country Comparisons—Military Expenditures,” in *The World Factbook*, 23 April 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2034rank.html>

<sup>300</sup> Jane’s Defence, “Eritrea: Army,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – North Africa*, 21 September 2011.

<sup>301</sup> Jane’s Defence, “Eritrea: Air Force,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – North Africa*, 21 September 2011.

<sup>302</sup> Jane’s Defence, “Eritrea: Navy,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – North Africa*, 21 September 2011.

<sup>303</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Part 2: Human Rights Violations: Overview; Indefinite Forced Conscription,” in *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/7>

<sup>304</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Eritrea,” April 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<sup>305</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119000.htm>

agricultural schemes, or construction and other manual labor projects.<sup>306, 307</sup>

Although their obligations are officially set at 18 months, it is widely reported that service members are conscripted for much longer periods—often indefinitely. Many Eritreans allegedly have been conscripted for more than a decade. The government cites the ongoing conflict with Ethiopia to justify this practice. According to Eritrean law, service members can be retained indefinitely “under mobilization or emergency situation directives given by the government.” Likewise, many Eritreans who have completed their obligations have been forced to remobilize.<sup>308</sup>

The government rigidly enforces participation in the program, which has grown increasingly unpopular with the Eritrean people. Because thousands of Eritreans have fled the country to escape indefinite conscription, the government has severely restricted travel. Military patrols and checkpoints seek draft dodgers and deserters. Eritreans must carry travel permits and identity cards that indicate their national service status, and they can be arrested and detained for failing to provide such documents.<sup>309</sup> Foreign travel is restricted for most of the population. Specifically, men below age 54 and women below age 47 reportedly are not permitted to leave the country. According to some reports, these ages represent the true upper age limits for national service obligations.<sup>310</sup>

Eritreans evading conscription or deserting the military face severe penalties. According to numerous reports, common punishments are indefinite detention (often in underground prisons or shipping containers), physical abuse, and torture. Family members of evaders may be fined or detained.<sup>311</sup> Border patrols reportedly operate under a “shoot to kill” policy for anyone leaving the country illegally.<sup>312</sup> Those who successfully escape may be sent back if they are detained by the authorities of certain countries, such as Egypt.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> The World Bank, “Eritrea: Country Brief,” April 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/CSITZX5Z80>

<sup>307</sup> IRIN—Integrated Regional Information Networks, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Eritrea: Climate-Proofing for the Future,” 8 May 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84285>

<sup>308</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Part 2: Human Rights Violations: Overview; Indefinite Forced Conscription,” in *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/7>

<sup>309</sup> Jack Kimball, “In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service,” Reuters, 18 July 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/18/us-eritrea-military-idUSL1412475520080718>

<sup>310</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea,” *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119000.htm>

<sup>311</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Part 2: Human Rights Violations: Overview; Indefinite Forced Conscription,” in *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/7>

<sup>312</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Part 2: Human Rights Violations: Restrictions on the Freedoms of Expression, Conscience, and Movement,” in *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/7>

<sup>313</sup> Jack Kimball, “In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service,” Reuters, 18 July 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/18/us-eritrea-military-idUSL1412475520080718>

## Issues Affecting Stability

### *Insurgent Groups*

During the 1998–2000 border war and since, Eritrea and Ethiopia have assisted insurgent groups acting against the other country’s government.<sup>314, 315</sup> Eritrea has supported the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).<sup>316</sup> Based in eastern Ethiopia, the ONLF is composed of ethnic Somalis who seek to form an independent state of Ogaden.<sup>317</sup> The group is responsible for numerous deadly attacks on Ethiopian military units and foreign workers.<sup>318</sup> Ethiopia, on the other hand, has served as a meeting ground for the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), a coalition of 13 opposition groups seeking to overthrow the Eritrean government.<sup>319</sup>



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EPLF Liberation soldier, 1991

The 1998–2000 conflict has also had serious implications for broader regional stability. As noted, Eritrea has provided arms and troop support to Islamist insurgent groups in Somalia, including the al-Shabaab organization, which the U.S. has officially designated as a terrorist group.<sup>320</sup> Eritrean-supported ONLF insurgents have also operated in Somalia, adding instability to the country.<sup>321</sup> The Ethiopian government continues to back the fragile Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia since Ethiopia ousted the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) with military force in 2006.

The primary opposition to the single-party Eritrean government is the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), a coalition of roughly a dozen or so groups. The umbrella organization formed in May 2008 when the groups met in the Ethiopian capital to organize what they called a “popular uprising” against Eritrean President Isaias

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<sup>314</sup> Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2011: Eritrea: Events of 2010,” 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2011/eritrea>

<sup>315</sup> Berouk Mesfin, “Situation Report: The Eritrea–Djibouti Dispute,” Institute for Security Studies, 15 September 2008, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>

<sup>316</sup> Fiona Lortan, “Africa Watch: The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict: A Fragile Peace,” *African Security Review* (Institute for Security Studies) 9, no. 4 (2000), <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/asr/9no4/Lortan.html>

<sup>317</sup> William Davison, “Ethiopia May Charge More Oromo Rebels, After Fighters Sentenced Over Plot,” Bloomberg, 10 June 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-06-10/ethiopia-may-charge-more-oromo-rebels-after-fighters-sentenced-over-plot.html>

<sup>318</sup> Rebecca Bloom and Eben Kaplan, “Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF),” Council on Foreign Relations, 1 November 2007, <http://www.cfr.org/ethiopia/ogaden-national-liberation-front-onlf/p13208>

<sup>319</sup> Reuters, “Eritrean Opposition Forms Alliance in Ethiopia,” 7 May 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL07813939>

<sup>320</sup> Alisha Ryu, “Somalia Accuses Eritrea of Illegal Arms Shipments,” Voice of America News, 4 May 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-05-04-voa41.cfm>

<sup>321</sup> *Ethiopia and the State of Democracy: Effects on Human Rights and Humanitarian Conditions in the Ogaden and Somalia, Hearing Before the Africa and Global Health Subcommittee, House Committee on Foreign Affairs* (2 October 2007) (statement of Jendayi E. Frazer, U.S. Department of State), <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EK0I-77M2JG?OpenDocument>

Afwerki.<sup>322, 323</sup> The organization is highly unstable, as its constituent factions jostle for position. The chairmanship of the group rotates among the leaders of the different groups. The group hopes to topple the current regime with the assistance of reform elements within the government.<sup>324, 325, 326, 327</sup>

Another group, the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization, has claimed to have carried out numerous deadly attacks on Eritrean military forces in recent years, and has vowed to continue.<sup>328, 329</sup>

### *Poverty and Repression*

Food security remains a pressing issue in Eritrea, where droughts, conflict, lack of economic development, and government restrictions have contributed to frequent shortages. Eritreans rely on limited food rations and subsistence agriculture. As the economy has stagnated and militarization efforts have monopolized the country's limited resources, it is estimated that more than half the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>330</sup> According to reports, the national



© Charles Roffey  
Homes in Assab

service program has contributed to this situation because of its high conscription rate and extremely low wages, which have been described as “insufficient to live on and completely inadequate to feed a family.”<sup>331</sup> Such conditions have motivated tens of thousands of Eritreans to flee the country.

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<sup>322</sup> Reuters, “Eritrea Opposition to Set Up Government in Exile,” 4 February 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL04376731>

<sup>323</sup> Tesfa-alem Tekle, “Eritrean Opposition Groups Call on Sudan to Lift Imposed Ban,” *Sudan Tribune*, 9 June 2008, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article27455>

<sup>324</sup> Reuters, “Eritrean Opposition Forms Alliance in Ethiopia,” 7 May 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL07813939>

<sup>325</sup> Tesfa-alem Tekle, “Eritrean Opposition Groups Agree to Form Full Alliance,” *Sudan Tribune*, 23 January 2008, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article25679>

<sup>326</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Eritrea*, September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

<sup>327</sup> Jane’s Defence, “Eritrea: Internal Affairs,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – North Africa*, 24 November 2010.

<sup>328</sup> Tesfa-alem Tekle, “Eritrean Opposition Forces to Launch a United Attack in 2011—Rebel Official,” *Sudan Tribune*, 4 January 2011, <http://www.sudantribune.com/Eritrean-opposition-forces-to.37477>

<sup>329</sup> *Sudan Tribune*, “Afar Rebels Continue Attack, Claim Killing 30 Eritrean Troops,” 2 January 2009, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article29739>

<sup>330</sup> World Health Organization, “Health Action in Crises: Eritrea,” October 2008, [http://www.who.int/hac/crises/eri/eritrea\\_oct08.pdf](http://www.who.int/hac/crises/eri/eritrea_oct08.pdf)

<sup>331</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Part 2: Human Rights Violations: Forced Labor,” in *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/7>

The Eritrean government consistently frames its policies and the difficult living conditions in terms of self-defense and self-reliance.<sup>332</sup> It also claims that the recent drought stems not from nature but from inadequate human efforts at development, and that Eritrea is not affected.<sup>333, 334</sup> Despite repeated reports of shortages, Eritrea continues to refuse food aid.<sup>335, 336, 337</sup>

Limited efforts by UNICEF have somewhat improved the welfare of the Eritrean people and their access to safe water and sanitation.<sup>338</sup> However, with little information disclosed by the Eritrean government, it is difficult to anticipate the full impact of the recent drought in the Horn of Africa and food shortages within Eritrea.<sup>339, 340</sup>

Observers have noted growing unrest among Eritreans in recent years, evidenced by the large flow of refugees to nearby countries.<sup>341</sup> Eritreans in Ethiopia, for example, now number about 50,000 and there are 800–1,000 more refugees arriving monthly.<sup>342</sup> One report asserted that President Isaias Afwerki faces an “internal legitimacy crisis coupled with mounting grievances and dissatisfaction from the subdued and distressed population who have lost family members...[and] have seen little reward for these sacrifices.”<sup>343</sup> These feelings, though not universal, are reflected in interviews with Eritreans. For example, one youth expressed frustration with the government’s frequent use of the conflict with Ethiopia to justify its policies: “They can blame anything—from the lack of flour to [military] mobilization—on the border issue.”<sup>344</sup> Another young Eritrean, a national service member who makes less than USD 10 per month, said, “I love my

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<sup>332</sup> Daniel Howden, “Fears that Eritrea May be Hiding its Famine Victims from the World,” *Independent*, 30 July 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/fears-that-eritrea-may-be-hiding-its-famine-victims-from-the-world-2328668.html>

<sup>333</sup> All Africa, “Eritrea: The Drought Claimed to Prevail in the Horn of Africa Needs to be Analyzed From Various Angles,” 2 August 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201108031229.html>

<sup>334</sup> Voice of America, “Eritrean Minister Says No Food Shortage in His Country,” 29 July 2011, <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2011/07/29/eritrean-minister-says-no-food-shortage-in-his-country/>

<sup>335</sup> Jeremy Clarke, “UNICEF Wants \$24.8 million for Eritrean Fund,” Reuters, 4 March 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E6230F020100304>

<sup>336</sup> *BBC News*, “Eritrea Refuses Food Aid,” 3 January 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8438207.stm>

<sup>337</sup> IRIN—Integrated Regional Information Networks, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Eritrea: Reaping the Wind,” 5 May 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=84233>

<sup>338</sup> UNICEF, “Eritrea,” 2011, [http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/files/HAC2011\\_4pager\\_Eritrea.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/files/HAC2011_4pager_Eritrea.pdf)

<sup>339</sup> Liz Ford, “Somalia Famine: US Pledges a Further \$28m in Aid,” 21 July 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2011/jul/21/somalia-famine-drought-us-aid>

<sup>340</sup> *Economist*, “East Africa’s Famine: Disunited in Hunger,” 21 July 2011, [http://www.economist.com/node/18989213?story\\_id=18989213](http://www.economist.com/node/18989213?story_id=18989213)

<sup>341</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, “Resentment and Rations as Eritrea Nears a Crisis,” *New York Times*, 16 October 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/16/world/africa/16eritrea.html?pagewanted=1&r=2>

<sup>342</sup> Relief Web, “Young Eritreans in Ethiopia Face Future in Limbo,” 21 July 2011, <http://reliefweb.int/node/435234>

<sup>343</sup> Berouk Mesfin, “Situation Report: The Eritrea–Djibouti Dispute,” Institute for Security Studies, 15 September 2008, <http://www.iss.co.za/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>

<sup>344</sup> *BBC News*, “Self-Reliance Could Cost Eritrea Dear,” 5 July 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/5121212.stm>

country, but I'm a young man and I want to earn money to support my family. We have a saying here. 'Service without reward is punishment.'"<sup>345</sup>

### Outlook

The Eritrean Army remained mobilized along the Ethiopian and Djiboutian borders in 2011. Neither Eritrea nor Ethiopia appeared willing to compromise in order to formally resolve the boundary issue. Their dispute continued to affect the security of the greater Horn of Africa, a strategically important region. Eritrea's military mobilization near Djibouti and its support of insurgent groups threatened the stability of neighboring governments, particularly the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG).



© Charles Roffey  
Houses in the Eritrean desert

The Horn of Africa has long been strategically important to the United States. The unimpeded flow of commerce through the Red Sea region remains a priority, but concerns regarding regional terrorism activities have become preeminent. After 11 September 2001, attention turned to rooting out terrorist havens in some Islamist countries, failing states, and developing nations with “ungovernable regions” (UGRs).<sup>346</sup> Although Eritrea's secular government is not comparable to the Shari'a-run governments of Sudan and Yemen or the failed regime in Somalia, its policies are nevertheless internally destabilizing. The United States' relations with Eritrea have deteriorated in recent years over human rights issues as the Eritrean government has tightened travel and work restrictions on the people.

The longevity of the government of President Isaias Afwerki may depend on its willingness and ability to address problems that cross ethnic lines. Rampant poverty, land tenure issues, political disenfranchisement, repressive measures, and famine have increasingly motivated Eritreans to become refugees, and have threatened to spur social unrest. The tenuous unity forged by the battle for self-determination provided temporary stability. But a Somali-style structural collapse or an Ethiopian-style centralized dictatorship failure is possible as long as “self-reliance” justifies heavy-handed policies that beget economic and social isolation.

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<sup>345</sup> Jack Kimball, “In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service,” Reuters, 18 July 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL14124755>

<sup>346</sup> Shaul Shay, “Chapter 7: The Islamic Terror Triangle—Comparative Aspects,” *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 160.

## Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Eritrea is one of the most militarized countries in the world.

**True**

In 2008, it was estimated that 320,000 of the country's 4.7 million citizens—approximately 1 out of every 15 Eritreans—served in the armed forces, making Eritrea one of the most militarized countries in the world in troops per capita.

2. The United States has offered periodic aid to Eritrea since Eritrean independence.

**True**

The U.S. sent food aid to Eritrea in the mid 1990s and gave more than USD 65 million to Eritrea in 2004. The U.S. has continued aid despite strained relations between the two countries.

3. Eritrea entered into a federation with the British in 1952.

**False**

After several years under British administration, Eritrea entered into a federation with Ethiopia in 1952.

4. Food security is a pressing issue in Eritrea.

**True**

Eritreans are forced to rely on limited food rations and subsistence agriculture. Drought, conflict, lack of economic development, and government restrictions cause frequent food shortages.

5. Eritrea's border dispute with Djibouti remains unresolved.

**False**

Although Eritrea has resolved its border dispute with Djibouti, the demarcation of its border with Ethiopia remains unsettled.

## Final Assessment

1. Eritrea is situated on the southern edge of the Horn of Africa.  
**False / True**  
Situated on the northern edge of the Horn of Africa, Eritrea occupies a strategic location on the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping routes.
2. Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, has a legacy of Italian-influenced architecture.  
**False / True**  
Asmara was well protected during Eritrea's war with Ethiopia and thus retains an abundance of architecture that demonstrates Italian influence.
3. Increasing oil production has placed serious pressures on Eritrea's fragile environment.  
**False / True**  
Eritrea is not currently a major oil producer; rather, agriculture and animal husbandry have placed serious pressures on Eritrea's fragile environment.
4. Over the last two decades, severe drought has caused serious food shortages in Eritrea.  
**False / True**  
Eritrea's most common natural hazard, drought has been severe over the last decade, causing serious food shortages and forcing the country to rely on food imports and foreign aid.
5. The central highlands are cooler, wetter, and more fertile than the rest of the country.  
**False / True**  
Most Eritreans live in the highland areas. Because of extensive agricultural activity, these areas suffer from soil degradation and desertification.
6. Historically, the Eritrean region's coastal access made it susceptible to influxes of foreign people and ideas.  
**False / True**  
The region's coastal access made it susceptible to the movements of people and ideas from North Africa (mainly Egypt), the Middle East, and Europe.
7. The Suez Canal took 15 years to build.  
**False / True**  
Completed in 1869, the Suez Canal took 15 years to build. The project was financed by a multinational conglomerate known as the Franco-British-Egyptian Suez Canal Company.
8. Germany engineered the famous railway line that crosses Eritrean territory.  
**False / True**

Italy engineered Eritrea's railway line during the early decades of the 20th century. Comprising more than 30 tunnels and 65 bridges, it is considered a remarkable feat of engineering.

9. Isaias Afwerki became the country's leader in 2001.

**False / True**

Since 1993, President Isaias Afwerki has held power through a number of national crises, including severe food shortages and war with Ethiopia over border disputes. Elections scheduled for 2001 were indefinitely postponed.

10. The Eritrean policy of "self-reliance" has increasingly isolated the country from the world community.

**False / True**

The Eritrean policy of "self-reliance" has been used to reject foreign aid while instituting governmental controls on the economy. It also has been used to quell internal dissent and to justify the continued rule by the one-party transitional government.

11. Between 1993 and 1997, Eritrea's economy contracted at an average annual rate of 13.1%.

**False / True**

After gaining independence in 1993, the Eritrean economy rebounded with an average yearly growth rate of 10.9% between 1993 and 1997. But the rate fell to – 13.1% in 2000 after a border dispute ignited 2 more years of fighting.

12. Industry accounted for less than 25% of Eritrea's national GDP in 2010.

**False / True**

Accounting for 22.5% of the GDP in 2010, Eritrea's industrial activity is based on food processing, beverage products, textiles and clothing, light manufacturing, cement, and salt.

13. All banks and financial institutions in Eritrea are owned and operated by the government.

**False / True**

All financial institutions in Eritrea, including the National Bank of Eritrea and the Commercial Bank of Eritrea, are owned and operated by the government.

14. The Eritrean government has rejected significant sums of foreign aid since 2005.

**False / True**

One of the primary economic goals of President Isaias Afwerki has been to dispel foreign influence and establish economic self-sufficiency.

15. Most businesses in Eritrea are privately owned.

**False / True**

Today, aside from small enterprises, most businesses are operated by the government.

16. Eritrea's hard-fought independence has engendered a deep aspiration for self-determination.  
**False / True**  
To promote national identity, the government has pursued a domestic and foreign policy of "self-reliance," tapping into the deep-seated Eritrean desire for self-determination.
17. Not to be mistaken for graffiti, urban Eritrean folk art paintings tend to evoke social and political messages.  
**False / True**  
Partly because of Eritrea's long struggle for liberation, Eritrean folk art paintings that evoke social and political messages are common in urban areas.
18. French bread has been an important staple of Eritrean cuisine since the Second World War.  
**False / True**  
A native bread known as *injera* is an essential feature of Eritrean meals.
19. Much like the women, Tigrinya men traditionally wear a long white cotton garment made from one large piece of fabric.  
**False / True**  
In Eritrea, Tigray men generally wear white pants and a long white shirt, as well as a shawl around the shoulders.
20. Although football (soccer) is popular, cycling is generally considered Eritrea's national sport.  
**False / True**  
Introduced by the Italians in the colonial era, cycling is generally considered Eritrea's national sport, but football (soccer) is a close runner-up.
21. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) was successful.  
**False / True**  
Following the 1998–2000 conflict, the UNMEE was formed to patrol a buffer zone along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. But because the Eritrean government cut off fuel supplies, the UN abandoned the mission in 2008.
22. Eritrea and Ethiopia have been staunch allies since Eritrean independence.  
**False / True**  
The late 1990s saw a border war and additional border incidents occurred in 2009 and 2010. The countries have also had a number of other tensions, including an alleged Eritrean plot in 2011 to bomb Ethiopia's capital.
23. Eritreans must carry travel permits and identity cards that indicate their national service status.  
**False / True**

The government has severely restricted travel while using military patrols and checkpoints to catch draft dodgers and deserters. Thus, Eritreans must carry travel permits and identity cards that indicate their service status.

24. The United States believes that Eritrea has not supported terrorists.

**False / True**

The United Nations has reported that Eritrea has given military aid to Islamist insurgent groups in Somalia. U.S. officials have acknowledged the reports as credible and designated Eritrea as “uncooperative in the War on Terrorism.”

25. Eritrea expanded its relationship with international aid organizations in 2005.

**False / True**

Distrustful of the West and fearing spies, in 2005 the Eritrean government asked international humanitarian organizations to leave the country.

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