



ERITREA ANALYSIS

**ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ERITREA:
SITUATION OVERVIEW, PILLARS OF SUPPORT AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES**

I SITUATION



1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Eritrea once had an incredibly promising future. In the wake of its war for independence from Ethiopia, the country was poised to develop a free, democratic society and take advantage of its economic resources. Eritrea formed as an independent nation and was recognized in 1993 under the leadership of the war hero Isaias Afwerki, who promised a democratic constitution and free elections after the country stabilized. The country quickly plunged into war again with its neighbors, culminating in a brutal conflict with Ethiopia. Both Ethiopian aggression and the political opportunism of the Afwerki regime shattered the democratic promise of Eritrea. Eritrea devolved into an isolated police state and one of the world's least-developed countries. Furthermore, the Afwerki regime has allegedly committed heinous human rights crimes that cause thousands of Eritreans to flee the country every month. The incredibly oppressive and violent Afwerki regime and the lack of economic development make peaceful opposition to the government difficult, but not impossible. Diaspora activists, driven from the country by war and crimes against humanity, have engaged with their home country to spread information about President Isaias Afwerki's crimes and to oppose his rule.

A brief summary of the historical circumstances underlying the modern Eritrean situation begins with the dissolution of the British colonial mandate in 1952 after World War II. The United Nations federated Ethiopia and

Eritrea as a compromise between the self-determination rights of both states; however, within 10 years, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie fully annexed Eritrea. This prompted the creation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which led the beginning of the 32 year long Eritrean War of Independence. Internal conflict in the ELF caused the splinter group, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), to assume leadership in the war against Ethiopia. The future President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, served as the Assistant Secretary-General of the EPLF and gained fame and experience through his wartime efforts. Military cooperation between Ethiopian and Eritrean resistance organizations and the intervention of international mediators resulted in a negotiated peace in 1993 and recognized Eritrean independence. These historical events provide proper context for the modern political developments in Eritrea covered throughout this report.



2. MODERN SITUATION

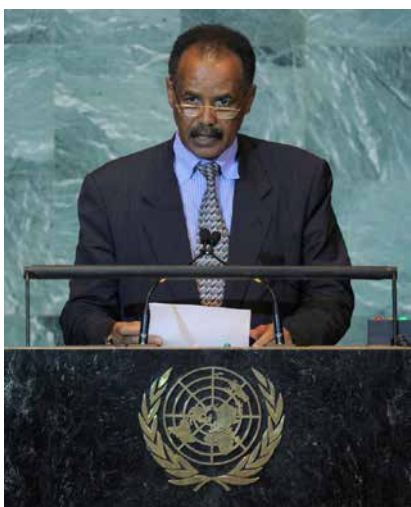


A. POLITICAL SITUATION

I PRESIDENT ISAIAS AFWERKI

President Isaias Afwerki has held a monopoly of power over the Eritrean state since his election in 1993 by the transitional National Assembly. His popular candidacy in the first election stems from his successes during the 32-year war of Eritrean independence, which he joined in 1966 after suspending his studies as an engineer. Afwerki was a leader in the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which promised pluralism and a progressive government as it defeated the Ethiopian military to achieve independence. Afwerki was hailed as a war hero by the Eritreans for defeating Ethiopia and for his promise for a better Eritrean future. The international community had high hopes for the emergence of Eritrea as a prosperous democratic state.

After being elected President, Afwerki swiftly seized authoritarian power instead of fulfilling his democratic promises. In 1997, he unilaterally banned international development agencies from the country. In 2001, Afwerki arrested his former EPLF allies for treason and shut down all private newspapers. Year by year, the Afwerki regime controls the Eritrean people by exploiting their fear of foreign invasion and by restricting freedom of speech, religion, and assembly. Furthermore, the UN



II NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:

PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE

released the results of a 2015 investigation into the Afwerki regime's human rights abuses and concluded that Afwerki is guilty of crimes against humanity, including forced labor campaigns, indefinite and unfair prison sentences, torture, and state-sponsored rape and murder.

In 2016, Afwerki serves as both head of state and head of government, including the State Council, his cabinet, and the National Assembly, the appointed representatives of Afwerki's People's Front for Democracy and Justice. While these are the explicit roles of the interim president, Afwerki informally holds unitary power over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

Following the Eritrean War of Independence in 1993, a transitional government was established in the country. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front, a left-wing nationalist party, was renamed the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, which still serves as the current ruling nationalist party. The rules of the temporary 1994 Eritrean constitution establish that the PFDJ is the only legal political party in Eritrea. The 1993 election was the only election for the Eritrean state, and it placed Isaias Afwerki as President of the National Assembly and the current parliament in power: National elections scheduled for 1995 and 2001 were postponed by President Afwerki. He justified this by claiming that the Ethiopian conflict disrupted the possibility of fair elections. National elections are still postponed indefinitely without new justification by the PFDJ government.

The PFDJ has little power to oppose the rule of President Afkweri-- even they are not safe from arrest, detention and torture. In 2001, when 15 members of the PFDJ wrote an open letter to the party about Afwerki's authoritarian tendencies, 11 of the members were arrested and accused of treason. Due to fear of detainment and violence, the National Assembly carries out the will of the President without dissent.

III COURTS

Theoretically, the Eritrean judicial system is a system of civil law based on Napoleonic code. The High Court of Eritrea consists of judges appointed solely by President Afwerki, an extension of executive power into judicial affairs. The High Court hears cases involving serious offenses and felonies, such as murder and rape. The government provides legal counsel to detainees and basic rights of trial, such as the right to confront and question witnesses, present evidence, have access to government-held evidence, etc. should be guaranteed

IV CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS: 1997

V MILITARY (ERITREAN DEFENSE FORCES)

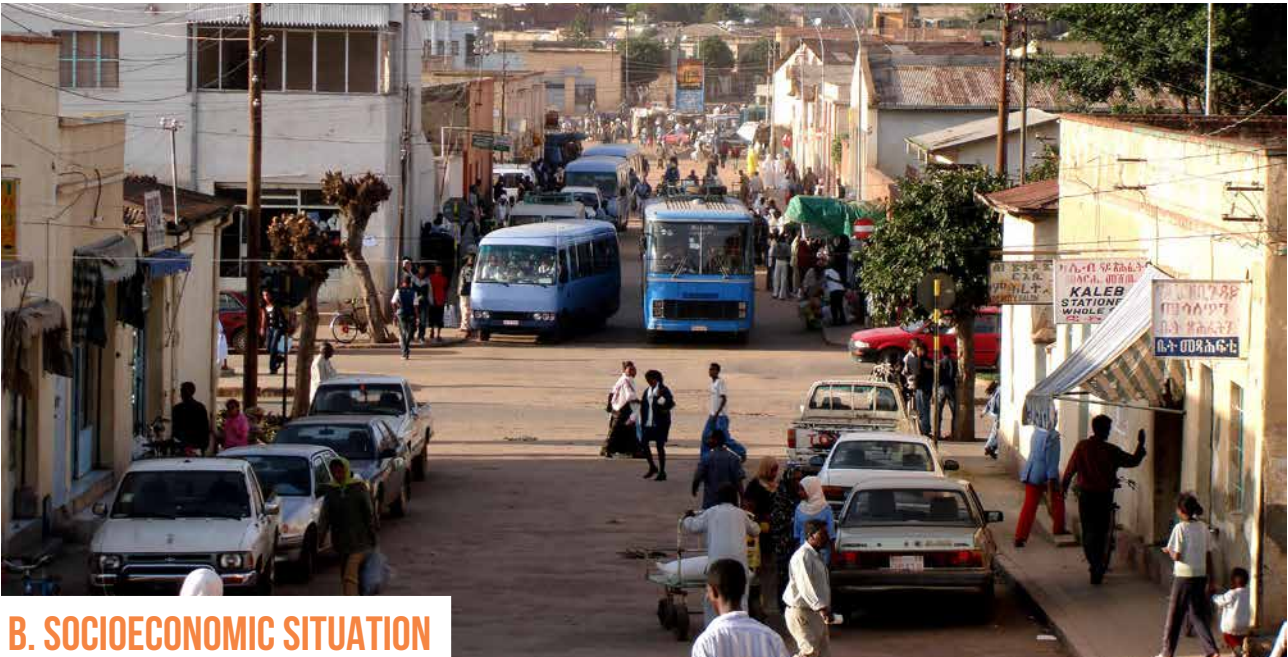


by written law. It is uncertain whether these rights are acknowledged in practice, and the United Nations has released multiple human rights reports which find that implementation of human rights protections for everyday citizens is nonexistent.

An executive-controlled Special Court exists to address capital offenses, theft, embezzlement, and corruption. In the Special Court, the judges are senior military officers who base their decisions on conscience rather than Eritrean law. Given the political pressure and consequences of dissent in Eritrea, it is likely that this lends to pro-government decisions rather than fair implementation of law. Citizens can be subject to double jeopardy in the Special Court if the attorney general demands a retrial of lower-court cases.

Although a democratic constitution was drafted and ratified by the National Assembly in 1997, no efforts have been made to implement it. The government of the 1997 constitution includes a democratically elected and limited executive branch, outlines the responsibilities of National Assembly and legislative branch as the central pillar of government, creates an independent judiciary branch, and protects the rights of citizens. The Afwerki regime's unwillingness to enact the constitution stalls the democratic progress of Eritrea and allows the PFDJ's authoritarian rule.

The Eritrean Defense Forces consist of the conscription-based army, air force, and navy of Eritrea. Although Eritrea's population is small at around four million, approximately half of its population is deemed available for military service, including children. The active personnel of the EDF is around 320,000. This high percentage of the population is reached through brutal conscription policies, where every Eritrean must commit to national service or face imprisonment or death. These national service terms theoretically last 18 months, but in reality can last indefinitely and up to decades. Indefinite service restricts the ability of young Eritreans to contribute to their economy, although the Afwerki regime claims that the forced labor program is necessary for Eritrean security and competitiveness. Beyond the manpower cost of the military to the Eritrean economy, military spending also accounts for approximately 20% of the Eritrean GDP. These trends show that Eritrea is among the most militarized countries in the world.



B. SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION

One hopeful situation in Eritrea is the country's steadily improving economy. Eritrea's GDP is among the top 10 fastest growing GDPs in the world at 4.8% growth in 2015, anchored by investments in a developing mining industry, the construction of a cement factory, and improvement in the agricultural sector. New industry has garnered attention from foreign investors, particularly from China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Electrification projects have succeeded with support of foreign investment. Furthermore, Eritrea has shown development in health and disease control. Regardless of these advancements, Eritrea is still among the least developed countries in the world. The country's GDP per capita is one of the lowest in the world. 80% of the population still depends on subsistence agriculture: agricultural success is dependent on the Eritrea's hard climate, which is susceptible to devastating droughts. Youth unemployment is rampant, and both economic and political struggles drive the well-educated youth to flee the country. Eritrea's constant state of conflict with bordering countries, namely Ethiopia, also causes sharp declines in foreign investment. War devastates the Eritrean economy due to destruction of property and loss of life, and it consistently reverses development progress. In addition, preparation for war also stifles economic growth, causing chronic debt due to Eritrean attempts to match the technology and manpower of the much larger Ethiopia. Massive Eritrean public debt hinders foreign investment prospects. Lastly, Eritrean aggression and human rights violations are met with stringent UN sanctions, which steer away potential investors and harm efforts for open market reforms.



C. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

I ETHIOPIA:



Eritrea has a long history of struggles and disputes with its neighbors. Most notably is the country's border conflict with Ethiopia since Eritrea's War of Independence in 1993. Their last major clash occurred as recently as the Eritrean-Ethiopian War from 1998-2000, which devastated the Eritrean economy and was used a political excuse by the Afwerki regime to delay National Assembly elections. Border skirmishes between the two countries occurred regularly throughout the early 2000s, regardless of the presence of United Nations peacekeeping forces. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea are accused of supporting revolutionary and insurgent militias in each other's countries, as well as in other East African nations. In June 2016, another major border skirmish occurred, causing fear of renewed war between the two countries.

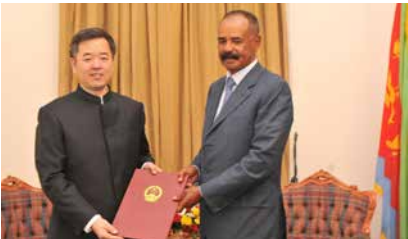
II DJIBOUTI:

Eritrea experienced similar border conflicts with Djibouti. The most recent conflict garnering international attention was in 2008, when Eritrean forces attack Djiboutian fortifications in the Ras Doumeira region. Reports say that this relationship is still tense, but improving.

III YEMEN AND SUDAN:

Although Eritrea has had territorial disputes with Yemen and Sudan, the Afwerki regime is working to build amicable relations and regional partnerships with both countries based on mutual anti-Ethiopian and anti-United States positions.

IV CHINA:



Eritrea is improving its relationship with China, a major trade partner. This historical relationship extends back to the Eritrean War of Independence, when PFDJ leaders, including Isaias Afwerki, were trained in leadership by Chinese experts. China is the top exporter of goods to Eritrea by far, including heavy machinery which has been integral in the development of Eritrean industry. The Eritrean government desires to expand this political and trade relationship in the future.

V GCC:



Eritrea is increasing its military and economic cooperation with countries the Gulf Cooperation Community. President Afwerki met publicly with the Saudi king Salman bin Abdelaziz to announce Eritrean inclusion in a 34-state Islamic coalition to defeat terrorism. There is speculation that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have cooperated with Eritrean military development, but no confirmation of these reports, given the secretive nature of Eritrean military affairs.

VI UNITED NATIONS AND WESTERN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS



The Afwerki regime and the United Nations have a tense and difficult relationship. Most recently, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea released a scathing report on the Afwerki regime's human rights violations, declaring that Eritrean officials are committing crimes against humanity including enslavement, rape, torture, and murder. The Afwerki regime refuted these claims as political attacks from Ethiopia and the harsh UN critique of developing nations. Alleged support for Al-Shabaab in Somalia and interventions in Djibouti are the reason for the sanctions established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1907, established in 2009 and continuing into the present. The Afwerki regime resists international authorities, expelling all international aid organizations and NGOs from Eritrea, such as non-partisan organizations which provide drought relief. A UN peacekeeping mission (UNMEE) was established in 2000 to ease tensions along the Ethiopian and Eritrean border. In 2008, UNMEE was forced to terminate its mission after the Eritrean government cut off fuel supplies to the UN peacekeepers.

The United States and the European Union states are generally supportive of the United Nation's stance on Eritrea and have struggling relations with Eritrea as a result.

D. DEMOGRAPHICS AND MIGRATION CRISIS



While the 2015-2016 refugee crisis has often been shown in terms of Middle Eastern refugees from Syria and Iraq, Eritrea is among the fastest-emptying nations in the world. Approximately 5,000 migrants leave every month due to dismal economic conditions and the government's human rights violations. The largest group among these refugees are unaccompanied minors and youth fleeing the Eritrean forced labor program. A World Bank demographic study suggests that the Eritrean diaspora consists of 1/3rd of all Eritrean nationals; these numbers include refugees from the current migration crisis as well as refugees who were displaced from the Eritrean War of Independence and the Eritrean-Ethiopian War.

Eritrean refugees undertake a dangerous journey northward in their efforts to escape the country. The Afwerki regime detains and tortures those who are caught trying to leave the country and has given the military a "shoot-to-kill" order for Eritrean refugees on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. Once in Ethiopian refugee camps, desperate Eritreans must collaborate with exploitative, dangerous smugglers for passage through Sudan to Tripoli. They often risk being held captive and tortured by armed groups, who hold Eritrean refugees to extort money from their families in Eritrea. Once on the Libyan



coast, the Eritreans must pay human traffickers again to travel by sea to Italy along a route where 3,000 refugees perished last year.

Once abroad, the Eritrean government extorts refugees by charging a 2% income tax on the diaspora, referred to as the diaspora tax. If the tax isn't paid, the government may refuse to provide the necessary documents to allow the Eritreans to legally exit the country and put them at risk for deportation back to Eritrea. Even worse, the Eritrean government threatens to harm and punish the relatives of refugees that are still in the country. This tax has been an integral part of the Eritrean state budget and allows the repressive Afwerki regime to persist. Some migrant-receiving countries, like the United Kingdom, have attempted to pass legislation to ban the diaspora tax. These countries have failed to gather enough domestic support to address the issue.



A major obstacle to political involvement of the Eritrean diaspora is their range of political opinions, from staunchly anti-government activists to government sympathizers. Many of the Eritrean refugees harbor intense anger for the exploitative and destructive Afwerki regime. Other live in fear that the Afwerki regime will punish their relatives in Eritrea. Anti-government Eritreans are also divided based on social class, religion, and ethnicity and have difficulty finding unity as an "Eritrean opposition," as their visions for change in the country are vastly different.



Regardless of their frustration with the Eritrean government, the Eritrean diaspora feels a strong political and cultural connection to the Eritrean nation. Members of the Eritrean diaspora struggle to reconcile their love for the Eritrean nation and their disdain for the Eritrean government; consequently, many Eritrean refugees are not politically active.

In contrast with anti-government activists, government sympathizers believe anti-government activity is betrayal of the Eritrean nation. Government sympathizers represent the Christian Tigrinya population in Eritrea and significantly more homogenous than government opposition



E. HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

The Afwerki regime is among the most repressive regimes in the world. Human rights violations are a central cause of Eritrean exodus from the country.

I FORCED LABOR:

The Eritrean mandatory national service program functions as a system of indefinite forced labor. Labor terms are open-ended and can last as long as 20 years. National service includes serving in the Eritrean defense forces without a right to conscientious objection or being assigned to manual labor in state industries. Children as young as 15 years old and elders are forced into mandatory service without exemption. Those who attempt to avoid this system are arbitrarily detained without trial and face physical and sexual abuse while imprisoned.

II ARBITRARY IMPRISONMENT AND TORTURE

Legal standards in Eritrea are abysmal. Imprisonment without charge or trial is the norm. Prison terms are indefinite. Prisoners are held in overcrowded cells with limited access to space and light, exposure to excessive heat and cold, inadequate food, water and sanitation. Physical abuse and torture is commonplace. Children are often detained with adults. The government operates a network of secret detention facilities.

III FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Freedom of religion is limited to the four faiths allowed by the Eritrean government: Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism (Evangelical Church of Eritrea). Members of other faiths face persecution, such as detainment and torture in attempt to make them abandon their faith. Jehovah's Witnesses are barred from government employment and refused Eritrean national identification cards. Within the religions that the government allows, the government interferes in religious affairs, appointing whomever they like to religious positions and deposing those who disagree with the government.

**IV FREEDOM OF SPEECH
AND FREEDOM OF
ASSEMBLY**

Since 2001, the Eritrean government has permit no independent media, labor unions, or NGOs to operate within Eritrea, resulting in Eritrea's complete isolation from the outside world. Eritrea is among the worst countries in press freedom and is reported to have 23 journalists in prison. In everyday conversation, Eritreans do not voice political opinions in fear of being reported to government informants. The only legal political party is the PFDJ, which is directly subordinate to President Afwerki. The Afwerki regime controls all union activity. Former politicians, journalists, and other opposition leaders are detained immediately and indefinitely. The government does not report the status of prisoners to their families, denies holding political prisoners in custody, and will not confirm reports of their death while in custody.

**V FREEDOM OF
MOVEMENT**

Eritreans refugees face horrible abuses from the Eritrean government. Eritrean border guards have "shoot-to-kill" orders against people who leave Eritrea without permission. Eritrean refugees who are deported and repatriated from foreign countries are often detained immediately when taken to Eritrea. Abuses against migrants are covered in greater detail in the Demographics and Migration Crisis section.

3. PILLARS ANALYSIS



A. PILLARS OVERVIEW

According to Gene Sharp, “Pillars of support are institutions and sections of the society that supply the existing regime with sources of power required for maintenance and expansion of its power capacity.” Nonviolent resistance movements analyze these power sources to identify the strengths and weaknesses of authoritarian regimes and democratic opposition. From this information, they may identify regime targets and develop effective opposition tactics.

President Isaias Afwerki and his PFDJ supporters have built a society that relies completely upon the Eritrean government for its security and prosperity and fears brutal government punishment for resistance. Civil society is completely banned or state-controlled. Basic human rights are regularly denied to representatives of peaceful opposition. There are many difficult obstacles for nonviolent resistance in Eritrea, but it is possible that activists using nonviolent tactics and strategies can reduce fear of the government and establish democratic civil society alternatives to the oppressive PFDJ.



B. PILLARS SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT

I AFWERKI REGIME AND THE PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE

The Afwerki regime and his supporting political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, have effectively strangled Eritrean civil society and eliminated all opposition movements. The one-party system, established through systematic resistance of democratic reforms, has created a monopoly of power for the PFDJ. Party supporters have access to outside information, education, and resources that empower the PFDJ to suppress the Eritrean public. PFDJ officials are able to use the facilities of the Eritrean police state, including the military and intelligence services, to destroy political opposition. There is evidence that PFDJ supporters receive unfair promotions and rewards at the cost of Eritrean citizens.

The alternative to blind support of the PFDJ is terrifying: President Isaias Afwerki's willingness to arbitrarily imprison and torture opposition leaders, as well as defiant members of his own party, has created a nearly impenetrable atmosphere of fear and oppression. PFDJ supporters must continue their support for the Afwerki regime for survival.

II ERITREAN DEFENSE FORCES



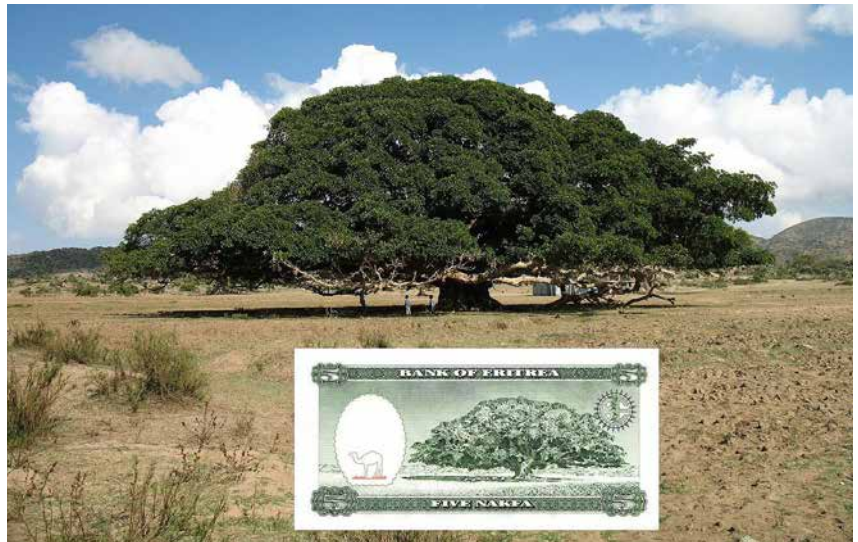
The Eritrean Defense Forces are an arm of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice and directly serve the President and Commander-in-Chief Isaias Afwerki. President Afwerki exploits the state of "no war, no peace" with Ethiopia as an existential threat to Eritrean security. Afwerki's policy is a textbook example of diversionary war, the usage of geopolitical conflict to divert attention away from domestic struggles, such as poverty and human rights abuses. Fear of Ethiopian invasion is used to mobilize Eritrean nationalism and empathy for the Afwerki government. The Eritrean population is willing to support conscription and mandatory national service because they believe that the international community (namely, the United Nations and the United States) blindly supports Ethiopian dominance of Eritrea. Although the intention of mandatory national service is to defend the country from Ethiopia, it is often used as a system of forced labor which serves as de facto slavery for state-run agriculture and industry. The PFDJ is able to use the military and Eritrean intelligence forces to suppress political opposition with mass violence. Similar to suppression of political opposition, those who object to mandatory national service or disobey military commands are subject to arbitrary and indefinite imprisonment, torture, and even execution, leaving no viable alternative for conscientious objectors.

III PRO-GOVERNMENT ERITREAN DIASPORA



Government supporters within the Eritrean diaspora are fueled by long-distance nationalism that makes no distinction between the Afwerki regime and the Eritrean nation. Thus, many believe that refusal to support the Eritrean government while abroad is a betrayal of Eritrean independence and national pride. These allegiances were maintained by pro-government sympathizers who migrated from Eritrea as a result of the long, brutal war of independence. At this time, there was optimism about Eritrea's transition into a new democratic state. Now removed from the country, first-generation government sympathizers are detached from the authoritarian policies of the Afwerki regime. To connect with the second-generation of pro-government diaspora Eritreans, the Afwerki regime is active in organizing events through the Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice (YFPDJ). The YFPDJ uses propaganda to harness the frustration of young Eritreans living in the West, where some Eritreans face discrimination as a result of xenophobia. This frustration is channeled into new Eritrean nationalism.

The Eritrean diaspora supports the government financially and by controlling the dialogue about the government. The pro-government diaspora willingly pays the 2% tax to prop up the government and is active in sending remittances to the country. This provides much-needed financial support to the Afwerki regime, which would otherwise struggle to fund the military and police state. Additionally, the pro-government diaspora actively promotes content favorable to the Afwerki regime, including government propaganda, and denounces news and opinions critical of the government. For example, pro-government Eritreans protested and denounced the findings of international human rights officials in 2016. Their counterarguments claimed an international conspiracy against Eritrea in the United Nations rather than promoting an open discourse about the Eritrean state.



IV ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The Eritrean economy functions as a command economy in which government activity dominates. As with political policies, the government is opaque in its economic handlings. International isolation and domestic authoritarianism give it complete control over production and labor. Government control of finance and banking and rejection of foreign capital create a hostile environment for most foreign investors. Investors that are willing to commit to an Eritrean project must gain the trust of Eritrean officials to get necessary permits for construction and travel, deal with an unrealistic, fixed-exchange rate, violate international sanctions on Eritrea, run the risk of using labor from forced conscription, among other political obstacles. The government has welcomed some foreign investment, but still holds shares in the industries that are driving Eritrean growth, particularly in mining and concrete production. Regardless of this success, the Afwerki regime policies continue to stunt Eritrean economic freedom and growth.

V CHINA AND MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT

Foreign involvement in Eritrea from China and the Gulf Cooperation Council bolsters the Afwerki regime's domestic and international legitimacy regardless of the president's human rights violation. Economic investment does have a positive impact on everyday Eritreans and contributes to the efforts of the government to develop the country. Political and military cooperation is more controversial. Countries must consider human rights implications and the greater stability of the Horn of Africa when supporting the Eritrean government.

Although UN sanctions are under review with dissent about their ongoing legitimacy, China (among other countries) weakens the legitimacy of international action in Eritrea by cooperating with the Afwerki regime before these sanctions are lifted. Eritrean revolutionary leaders were educated in China during the War of Independence, and these political ties have likely continued. China has stated its plans to expand its relationship with Eritrea; this may legitimize the oppressive government and make it harder for peaceful regime change in the future.



Likewise, the continued involvement of the GCC in Eritrea has bolstered the Afwerki regime. It is hard to understand the degree to which Eritrea is cooperating with states like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia given the secrecy of Eritrean state affairs. Reports of military cooperation between the GCC and Eritrea only serve to strengthen the Afwerki regime's political grip over the armed forces and to perpetuate tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is polarizing as foreign interlocutors become involved on both sides, and both countries and their allies should be encouraged to demilitarize.



C. SPLIT ALLEGIANCES

I UNITED NATIONS AND WESTERN INVOLVEMENT (EU, US)

The United Nations has struggled to properly address both the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict and the Eritrean human rights violations. The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict has constantly fueled Eritrean militarism and nationalism, and given the Afwerki regime reason to blame the UN and western powers for failure to reach fair peace between the countries. Ethiopia, an ally of the United States and other Western countries, has been allowed to violate an international agreement about the Eritrean-Ethiopian border zone. As the United Nations releases reports about abysmal Eritrean human rights violations, they choose not to investigate Ethiopia, where human rights violations take place as well (albeit, to a lesser extent). United Nations sanctions on Eritrea, which were placed as a result of Eritrean support for militant groups in its neighboring countries, persist even though those countries have stabilized. Apparent UN favoritism for Ethiopia has caused Eritrean hostility toward international and Western authorities in the Horn of Africa. Government supporters gain traction with both domestic and diaspora Eritreans using an “us against the world” mentality. Whether or not the rationale for supporting Ethiopia is justified, UN diplomatic ties with Eritrea suffer immensely as a result of it.

Past failures must be rectified because the United Nations is key for the reintegration of Eritrea into international politics. Eritrean involvement in world markets and intellectual exchange will only improve Eritrea’s rate of development, civil society structures, and capacity for greater civil rights and political freedoms. Western powers must approach soft diplomacy carefully, as the legacy of foreign imperialism still haunts the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.



D. POTENTIAL ALLIES FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM

I ANTI-GOVERNMENT DIASPORA ACTIVISTS

Anti-government activism is on the rise, led by Eritrean diaspora activists that have used innovative non-violent methods to achieve democracy and greater civil rights in Eritrea. Most notably, Arbi Harnet (Freedom Friday) is a network of Eritrean activists from the United States and the European Union which builds solidarity between diaspora activists and domestic Eritrean activists in their effort for resistance to the Afwerki regime. They have faced many obstacles, given the government stranglehold on media and communications into the country, but have succeeded using low-tech, grassroots activism to build a foundation for a peaceful movement in the country.

The hallmark of the Arbi Harnet campaign in Eritrea consists of “robo-calls” into the country that deliver pre-recorded messages to homes across Eritrea. These automated calls ask for Eritreans to “silence the streets” on certain days as an act of defiance toward the government. Simply, Eritreans choose not to go out on the weekends. This mass resistance campaign has been successful in creating trust and solidarity between international activists and Eritreans who seek peaceful regime change. Diaspora activists hold rallies in major American and European cities abroad to build international awareness of the Afwerki regime’s crimes and to support international aid for the Eritrean people. Post-



ers and underground magazines have been printed and dispersed in Eritrea as well, to spread information about government crimes and to rally support for further activism.

Regardless of these successes, Arbi Harnet and the growing Eritrean activist network face many obstacles. Unifying the diaspora has been very difficult, as members of the diaspora have diverse ideologies, religions, and ethnicities. Consequently, the diaspora opposition groups have many different ideas about how Eritrean should change and what the ideal Eritrean government should look like. The pro-government diaspora movement is strong and unified in their message and actively works against the progress of the pro-democracy diaspora. In addition, democratic activists in Eritrea and abroad are ostracized by the Eritrean government and face severe punishment if they are singled out in acts of resistance toward government policies.

II YOUTH GROUPS



Eritrean youth are most affected by the policies of the Afwerki regime and are a resourceful base for future democratic action in the country. Eritrean students are well-educated and resourceful, although the Eritrean economy cannot provide enough opportunities to take full advantage of their potential. Furthermore, mandatory national service is an exploitative program that deprives Eritrean youth of the defining years of their lives. The youth lose the most as a result of the Afwerki regime's increasingly violent, authoritarian policies, as evidenced by the amount of young Eritrean refugees who leave the country self-motivated or with the support of their parents. Youth also have the most to gain from regime change in Eritrea, including the ability to build a country that serves the people and to reunite the Eritrean diaspora with hope for the future.

III MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Military officers have already mutinied against the Afwerki regime for the purpose of achieving constitutional change and the release of political prisoners. In 2013, a small army mutiny took place when a group of soldiers stormed a state-run media organization headquarters (EriTV) and forced a broadcaster to read a prepared statement regarding the Afwerki regime's human rights violations and delay of the 1997 constitution. The broadcast was quickly cut short. This shows some frustration within the military about the policies of the government, but also demonstrates the swiftness of government loyalists in suppressing violent action against the regime.

A military coup or violent revolution in Eritrea is not practical for the establishment of a democratic government. There is a possibility to convince government soldiers to disobey orders and to not take violent action against peaceful protesters and dissenters. Improvement of the human rights situation in Eritrea cannot progress as long as Eritreans fear surveillance and violence from the national military, intelligence, and police forces.



IV RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Religious organizations may be another avenue to pursue an improvement of the human rights situation in Eritrea. The Eritrean government does not recognize the freedom of assembly, and there are very civil society structures that exist. Religious forums are one avenue where Eritreans gather under a unified message and could recognize government violations of religious freedom. There are examples of religious authorities protesting government control of religious organizations; for example, the patriarch Abune Antonios of the Eritrean Orthodox Church was deposed, placed under house arrest, and denied necessary medical care. His actions have been a rallying point for the international Christian community to protest the Eritrean government. Energy and support in the religious community can be a base of support for pursuing the expansion of religious freedoms, although one must be cautious that political activism in religious organizations doesn't create conflict between different religions.

4. POTENTIAL OUTCOMES



A. POSITIVE OUTLOOK: DIASPORA COHESION AND SLOW-MOVING REVOLUTION

A positive outcome for Eritrean activists will be difficult to achieve given the viciousness of the government, the difficult economic conditions of the developing country, and the lack of information available to Eritrean activists given the isolation of the country. Establishing civil, free society in Eritrea and eroding the power of the Afwerki regime will take a dedicated and concerted effort from the diverse Eritrean populace and diaspora. **This is no reason to lose hope:** pro-human rights and pro-democratic movements have always faced uniquely difficult obstacles, and many of them have found a way to succeed in spite of doubts.

An immediate strategy for Eritrean activists must begin by developing a unified protest platform against the Afwerki regime and establishing a routine of low-risk protest methods.

Rallying all Eritreans around resistance to the Afwerki regime is critical to the success of the any political activism in the country and abroad. As long as pro-democracy Eritreans are divided by ethnic, religious, or political ties, the movement will be weakened. These are long-term goals but can establish an ideal future for Eritrea.



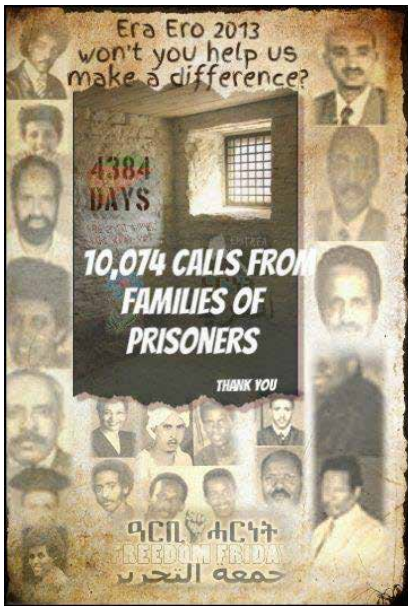
A movement for Eritrean solidarity should begin with basic demands and building off the past democratic promises of the PFDJ's political platform. Activists can unite around the progressive 1997 constitution, which would have carried out the democratic promise of Eritrean independence. The constitution promised robust protection of human rights, equality for the different constituencies of Eritrea, the economic rights of citizens, a government system with checks and balances, and a limited executive. The terms would be agreeable to all Eritreans and allow dissenters to compromise with each other in a democratic government to establish a proper, legitimate government to represent the people. The National Assembly ratified it, but the Afwerki regime failed to implement the constitution.

Thus, current President Isaias Afwerki is an obstacle to the democratic progress of Eritrea and activists should ask that he step down. This may be controversial, as President Afwerki is still beloved by many of his supporters, who reflect on his dedication to the Eritrean independence movement, his early promises of democracy, and his work to ensure the economic progress of Eritrea. These facts are outweighed by Afwerki's establishment of a police state in Eritrea, the reported human rights crimes of his regime, his indefinite suspension of the 1997 constitution and his multiple rejections of free and fair elections. The maintenance of the current regime cannot coexist with democratic progress.



Once Afwerki is removed, free and fair elections should establish a new government immediately. New political leaders and political organizations can be formed to best represent the Eritrean populace. These leaders could come from civil society and from the alliance of protest leaders who work for regime change. The work of a long-lasting democratic change will be difficult and imperfect, but is work worth doing for the prosperity of the Eritrean people.

In addition, Eritreans must continue to develop low-tech and low-risk methods of resistance to the Afwerki regime. Access to social media in Eritrea is limited by the country's ongoing development as well as the draconian policies of the Afwerki government, so Eritrean activists must draw inspiration from past nonviolent movements rather than mimic social media activism of recent years. However, bold actions such as public protests and strikes may be met with the unrestrained violence of the police forces and military. To build momentum for protest action in Eritrea, national activists must slowly increase the intensity of their tactics and actions.



Arbi Harnet has already set a great example for nonviolent activism between the diaspora and the Eritrea populace. Robocall campaigns to encourage Friday boycotts have been successful. Poster campaigns and publishing the underground Meqaleh Forto (Echoes of Forto) magazine have reached the Eritrean public and spread awareness of the Afwerki regime. Diaspora rallies abroad held against the regime help build solidarity between the diaspora and those still in Eritrea. Progress is slow, but these actions chip away at government control.

Providing undeniable evidence of the human rights violations of the Afwerki regime is an important part of building international awareness of the Eritrean struggle as well as combating the denial of the Afwerki regime and its supporters. Photo or video evidence is a risk to obtain, the reward of revealing the regime's crimes could be immense. International pressure on the Afwerki regime could speed up the progress of democratization and justice for victims. In addition, denial from pro-government Eritreans would be silenced in the face of definite evidence of government-sponsored torture, detention, and murder.

Further protest action should continue along the already-successful guidelines of the Arbi Harnet movement. Passive resistance and protest similar to Norwegian and Danish resistance to the Nazi occupation is a way to safely continue resistance to the brutal Afwerki regime. The general populace can resist the government by showing up late to work and leaving early, actively making mistakes in government-owned factories, and using other methods to make economic activity in Eritrea inefficient. Economic pressure can be applied by the diaspora by refusing in solidarity to pay the 2% diaspora tax, effectively strangling the Eritrean government by limiting its source of foreign income. In addition, poster campaigns, phone calls, social media posts, and street art should continue in opposition to government propaganda. These tactics can erode government pillars of support and build a peaceful movement for a responsible, democratic Eritrean state.



B. NEGATIVE OUTLOOK: ISOLATION AND REPRESSION

A negative understanding of the Eritrean struggle for democracy and human rights takes account of the overwhelming fear caused by the President Isaias Afwerki and the PFDJ in ruling Eritrea. Afwerki is willing to use the military and police forces against his own people and to agitate conflict with Ethiopia to distract from his regime's reported human rights crimes and the Eritrean migration crisis. The Eritrean government hardly relies on external support to maintain itself as a result of years of isolation. Thus, violence can be used against democratic activists without meaningful rebuke from the international community.

Pro-democracy activists struggle to build a coalition of Eritreans and Eritrean diaspora activists capable of influencing the government. Access to technology and information draws a divide between the two groups. Stifled communication prevents effective cooperation. In addition to the geographic divide between the Eritrean peoples, there is also a struggle to produce consensus among diaspora activists. The rift between pro-government and pro-democracy forces is strong, and even pro-democracy activists are divided about their vision of Eritrea's future. A lack of organization can crush the motivation for activism against the Afwerki regime.



C. LIKELY OUTCOME: CONTINUED ISOLATION AND REPRESSION

Unfortunately, recent evidence points to continued isolation and repressive policies of the Afwerki regime. In 2016, the Afwerki regime denounced human rights reports from the United Nations as Ethiopian propaganda, and the government continues to dodge blame for the outflow of Eritrean migrants from the country. The government has no proper response to the many accusations of Eritrean migrants about the horrific situation they are fleeing.

Opposition to the United Nations has steepened the divide between pro-government and pro-democracy activists, who protest and counter-protest over the legitimacy of reports on human rights crimes in Eritrea. A border clash between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June has caused renewed conflict between the two countries and also created more tension in the diaspora regarding the issue of Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict. A series of recent protests in Geneva highlights the divided nature of the diaspora and the ability for both sides to motivate large groups of supporters for and against the regime. While Eritrea isolates from the broader international community, they have found powerful patronage from international corporations and states who are willing to ignore the human rights accusations against the country.

With these facts considered, Eritrea is far from democratic regime change, and pro-democracy activists have an arduous journey to seeing a just and free Eritrean state.

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