



Thesis

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**ERITREA AND THE
NATIONAL QUESTION IN
ETHIOPIA**

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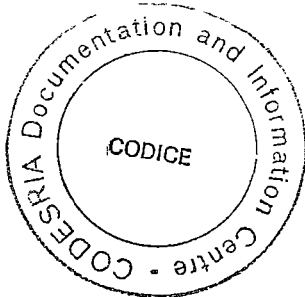
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ERITREA AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempted to examine the bases and impact of externalisation on the Eritrean national question in Ethiopia. It began by tracing the origins of the Eritrean problem, the major phases of Eritrean nationalism as well as Ethiopia's responses to the national question. Cojointly, it identified the external accourtments of both the Eritrean nationalist movement and Ethiopia's responses to the insurgency. It further identified and analysed the variety of external actors and forms of international involvement in the conflict. Finally, it explained the overall impact of externalisation on the Eritrean struggle for self-determination.

The methodology employed was mainly the analysis of primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources used were official reports and publications of governments, documents and publications of the Eritrean liberation fronts, reports of international news media, interviews and personal communications with Eritrean and Ethiopian official representatives. These were supplemented by secondary sources such as books and journal articles

by academics, diplomats, journalists and the works of other authorities germane to the subject-matter.

It was found out that the Eritrean problem was rooted in material contradictions arising from the mutually opposing forces of Eritrean nationalism and imperial Ethiopia. It was also found out that external geo-political considerations played a great part in ^{sowing} sowing the seeds of the conflict. The study also showed that international involvement inhered in the logic of the national question once it assumed the dimension of a full-fledged nationalist conflict.

Broadly, externalisation has occurred at two levels: (i) at the level of the warring parties, and (ii) at the level of the international community. At the first level, both parties to the conflict have had to solicit external support, exploiting and manipulating the interests of foreign actors to bolster their positions. At the level of the international society, externalisation was examined from the perspectives of individual state actors, who for various objectives, have been drawn into the conflict. At the regional and global-systemic levels, the dominant forces showed their vested interests in safeguarding these norms and principles of international

relations which serve the end of regime and state security. As bastions of the prevailing international legal and normative regime, state-actors and inter-governmental organisations such as the UN and the OAU placed premium on order and stability over above other considerations like rights and justice. Despite the merits of their claims and the profoundness of the nationalist movement, the international community generally isolated the Eritrean cause because of its potentially debilitating implications for international order, particularly at the African regional level. What has kept Ethiopia together, therefore, was the political, diplomatic and military support it attracted from the international community. Addis Ababa's stake in preserving its territorial integrity coincided with the dominant regime of values and considerations shared by the major actors in the international system.

This enquiry has however shown that the incidence of externalisation is not unilinear. Neither is it ephemeral nor episodic. Rather it is a continuous and dynamic process responding to changes in conditions of the warring parties and developments in the external environment. Because of its persistence and explosiveness,

as well as the changes in the external environment, there has occurred a shift in the way the international system has treated the Eritrean question - from tight isolation - to a new attitude of reconciliation. Having fought in virtual obscurity for about three decades, the Eritrean forces have succeeded in breaking out of isolation, gaining, in the process, a measure of international recognition for their cause. Although the Eritreans now seem to be in the threshold of victory via the declaration of a de facto Eritrean state, they have yet to surmount the deep-seated normative and structural constraints in the international system which impede the setting up of new authorities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency.
ELF:	Eritrean Liberation Front.
ELF-CL:	Eritrean Liberation Front/Central Leadership.
ELF-PLF:	Eritrean Liberation Front/Popular Liberation Forces.
ELF-RC:	Eritrean Liberation Front/Revolutionary Council.
EPLF:	Eritrean People's Liberation Front.
ELM:	Eritrean Liberation Movement.
JSPL:	Joint Supreme Political Leadership.
METO:	Middle East Treaty Organisation.
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
NLF:	National Liberation Front.
OAU:	Organisation of African Unity.
PDRY:	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.
PLO:	Palestine Liberation Organisation.
PLF-CC:	Popular Liberation Forces/Central Command.
PLF-PRC:	Popular Liberation Forces/Provisional Revolutionary Council.
PMAC:	Provisional Military Administrative Council.
SPLA:	Sudanese People's Liberation Army.
WSLF:	Western Somali Liberation Forces.

CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Problem and Objectives of Study

One of the most obtrusive features of international politics in contemporary time is the greater involvement of external actors in local conflicts. This development is due, by and large, to the transformation in the character of the international system and its constituent units. In the wake of the revolutions in modern technology, emergence of new actors as well as universal and competitive ideological systems, the international system has become smaller and smaller with greater and diverse forms of interaction among its constituent units and actors.¹ According to James Schlesinger, the world has become a "single strategic stage" with its separate theatres inevitably linked, sometimes closely and sometimes more loosely.²

As the system shrinks, events in one country have become increasingly relevant for every other nation and issues that were once considered strictly "domestic

1. For changes and developments in the international system in this century, see, J.H. Herz, International Politics in the Atomic Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); F.S. Northedge, The International Political System (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), Stanley Hoffman, "The Future of the International Political System: A Sketch", in Samuel P. Huntington and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (eds), Global Dilemmas (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, 1985).
2. James Schlesinger, "The International Implications of Third World Conflicts: An American Perspective", Adelphi Papers, No.166 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies) Summer 1981, p.5.

matters" now readily assume international and, at times, global ramifications. Nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in the regions of the Third World which have historically been targets of foreign forces competing for markets, bases, clients and influence. In the last century, this imperial quest culminated in the formal colonisation of these areas, that is, Africa, Asia and Latin America and, despite the formal termination of foreign control at independence, the patron-client relationship between the metropolises and the erstwhile colonial territories survived in the succeeding neo-colonial order.³

Certain developments in the post-world War II period contributed to the spread and consolidation of foreign influence in the Third World. As a result of the emergence of the super powers, the advent of thermo-nuclear weapons and the polarisation of Europe along the lines of the two ideological systems, great power interaction in the core of the system has become stabi-

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3. Elenka Mb'uyinga, Pan Africanism or Neo-colonialism? (London: Zed Press, 1982); Claude Ake, Revolutionary Pressures in Africa (London: Zed Press, 1978); in M. Shaw and Kenneth A. Heard (eds), The Politics of Africa: Dependence and Development (London: Longman, 1979); Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-Colonialism (New York: International Publishers, 1966), and, Jack Woddis, Introduction to Neo-Colonialism (New York: International Publishers, 1967).

lised and less venturesome. Consequently, and as the major world sought alternative terrains to valorise their strength and compete for influence, the Third World, once again, became the focal point of rivalry by outsiders. In spite of the decolonization process which transformed erstwhile colonies into newly 'autonomous' states, external involvement in (or, control of) their economic and political affairs remains a resilient feature.

The systemic and global pressures aside, several governments and their opponents in these underdeveloped regions actively solicit external support to bolster their positions, and when the conditions suit a particular foreign interest, the possibility arises that a purely local conflict will become internationalised. Internationalisation, therefore, arises from a conjunction of local and external factors and interests.⁴ As Colin Legum has observed:

The new phenomenon, then, was the externalization of inter-African conflicts, brought about by militarily and economically weaker local forces engaging the support of foreign powers. When interests coincided, alliances became possible. So, far from being helpless victims - as in the past - Africans themselves

4. For an elaboration of this theme, see Timothy M. Shaw, "The Future of the Great Powers in Africa: Toward a Political Economy of Intervention" (mimeographed). Another version of this paper has appeared under the title, "Security Redefined: Unconventional Conflict in Africa" in Stephen Wright and Janice N. Brownfoot (eds) Africa in World Politics (London: Macmillan, 1987) pp. 17-34.

had to accept full responsibility for the greater involvement of both western and communist countries in the continent's affairs.⁵

One problem that easily gets externalised is the enduring and thorny contradiction between state and nation, manifesting in violent communal conflicts and wars of secession in several parts of the African continent. Since the immediate post-colonial period, this problem, generally conceptualised as the "national question", has been as seriously disruptive force in national and regional politics.⁶ Indeed, most of the intractable conflicts that presently plague the continent are between the opposing forces of the state (or the ruling group) and those who see themselves as oppressed minorities or majorities and are claiming the right to some reliefs or complete self-determination.⁷ The

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5. Colin Legum, "The Year in Perspective" in his Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents, Vol. 10, 1977-78 (New York: Africana, 1979) p. XX.
 6. For an exposition on the "National Question" see pp. 5-6 below.
 7. For some perspectives on this problem, see, D. Rothchild and V. Olorunsola (eds), State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1983); Naomi Chazan and Donald Rothchild (eds) Reordering of the State in Africa (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986); Tony Edoh, "The National Question, Representative Public Service and the Federal Character Debate", Studies in Politics and Society 3, April 1985 pp. 95-109; Colin Legum, "Communal Conflict and International Intervention in Africa", in Colin Legum, et al, Africa in the 1980s: A Continent in Crisis (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1979) pp. 23-66; Benjamin Neuberger, National Self-Determination in Post Colonial Africa (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1986); and Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (eds), The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa (Boulder: Westview, 1988).

centrality of this problem in African political life can hardly be exaggerated and, moreover, it has attracted external involvement, thus intensifying the competition among outsiders for political and military influence in the continent.⁸ For a continent with a long history of exposure to external pressures and a mushroom of states most of which are weak, dependent and are yet to forge a sense of national identity among their peoples, foreign involvement in its internal disputes is perhaps predictable. What is unpredictable is the form and impact of international involvement in different situations.

In some cases, the international community encourages and supports the insurgent movement, in other situations and at other times, it is the incumbent regime that receives all the support, while the claims of the opponents are suppressed. Externalisation, then, is not a uniform or unidimensional phenomenon. Rather, it is multi-dimensional and dynamic, reflecting changes both in the internal conditions of the crisis-torn society as well as the interests and forces in the external environment.

8. On the incidence of external involvement in African politics, see, for example, Colin Legum et al, Africa in the 1980s, op.cit., Gerald Chailand, The Struggle for Africa: Conflict of the Great Powers (London: Macmillan, 1982) Arthur Gavshon Crisis in Africa: Battleground of East and West (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1981); I. William Zartman, Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

9. On the phenomenon of externalisation and its variables see, Patrick James, "Externalisation of Conflict: Testing a Crisis Based Model", Canadian Journal of Political Science XX (3) September 1987, pp. 573-598.

To capture the incidence of foreign involvement in the Eritrean problem, therefore, this study examines the internal dynamics of the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict and the ways these impinge upon and are, in turn, affected by forces in the external environment.

The National Question, Nationalism and Its International Aspects:

The national question is a classical phrase for two crucial and related problems confronting the state system. One aspect is the problem of bringing together culturally and ethnically distinct groups in a country to accept some minimum value consensus for the establishment and maintenance of the socio-political order. In polyethnic states, the problem manifests itself in a series of contradictions between some or all of the nationalities and the state. In this situation, the national question involves the task of assuaging the sentiments of aggrieved nationalities, eliminating national inequalities and eliciting deference to the state with a view to forging a coherent political community which all within accept. According to Neuberger, this involves the exigency of bringing nation and state into coincidence, that is, "welding a number of nationalities into a new nation coterminus with the state."¹⁰ All over

10. Benyamin Neuberger, National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa, op.cit., p.10.

the African continent, attempts at resolving the problem have usually ended up in protracted fratricidal wars and insurgencies.¹¹

The other aspect of the problem, also referred to as the "national-colonial question"¹² arises where colonisation had taken place and the oppressed nation or nationality-harbours a feeling of historical and material deprivation--seeks political separation from what it regards as an alien authority through a nationalist movement for self-determination. In this regard, the problem is clearly one of competing nationalisms and has been a central feature of contemporary African state-system.

In its widest sense, nationalism refers to the expression of belonging to a nation, the expression of national sentiment by a people in the process of creating a nation, by a nation which desires sovereignty or by a nation which aspires to a higher stage of national

11. See, Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola (eds) State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemma.

12. For a comprehensive discussion of this aspect, see Sally Healy, "The Changing Idiom of Self-determination in the Horn of Africa" in I.M. Lewis (ed.) Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa. (London: Ithaca Press, 1983).

cohesion and consolidation.¹³ According to Smith, it is both an ideology and movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, cohesion and individuality for a social group deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation.¹⁴ Despite this attempt at a concise definition, it is clear that the concept encapsulates a cluster of referent features which can be condensed into the diverse types of nationalism. As it is generally used, some of the referents and uses include the following:

- (1) national character or nationality; (2) an idiom, phrase or trait peculiar to the 'nation';
- (3) a sentiment of devotion to one's nation and advocacy of its interests; (4) a set of aspirations for the independence and unity of the nation; (5) a political programme embodying such aspirations in organisational form; and
- (6) a variety of socialism, based on nationalisation of industry.¹⁵

Varieties of Nationalism

There are different ways of classifying nationalisms. Indeed, the literature is replete with an array of taxonomies.¹⁶

13. For varying perspectives on nationalism, see, for instance, E.H. Carr, Nationalism and After (London: Macmillan, 1945); Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism (London: Duckworth, 1971); Boyd C. Shafer, Faces of Nationalism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1972); and, I.M. Lewis, Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa.
14. Anthony D. Smith, "Introduction: The Formations of Nationalist Movements" in Anthony D. Smith (ed.), Nationalist Movements (London: Macmillan, 1976) p.1.
15. Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism, p.167.
16. See, for instance, Boyd C. Shafer, Faces of Nationalism. Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism, op.cit.

At the broadest levels, there are two categories of nationalism - "Ethnocentric nationalism" and "polycentric nationalism".¹⁷ Ethnocentric nationalism is defined in terms of cultural exclusivity because, for its advocates, power and value inhere in the cultural group.

By contrast, polycentric nationalism is outward looking and multi-centered. Although equally concerned with the collective identity, it recognises that other groups have valuable ideas and institutions which could be borrowed or adapted. Its advocates want their group to join the comity of nations to find its appropriate identity and play its part.¹⁸ The distinction between these two categories, also conceptualised as "primitive" and "developed" respectively, is ideal-typical. Examples of the former include the primary or traditional resistance to colonial invasion in several parts of Africa during the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The latter refers to the modern form of nationalism which had its origin in Europe between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but as it became a world-wide phenomenon, polycentric nationalism has gone through different muta-

17. On the bases of these categories see, Anthony D. Smith Theories of Nationalism pp. 158-167.

18. Ibid.

19. For an incidence of the primary or primitive form of nationalism, see, James Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California 1960); Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

tions and stages. Nonetheless, it retains its distinctive features which are the aspirations for the attainment of self-rule and independence and for its maintenance through the corollaries of integration, unity, prestige and power.

Despite this unity, polycentric nationalism exhibits considerable variation. In other words, although all modern nationalisms reveal certain basic characteristics which place them under the same category, some other features are present in some, and absent in others, thus compelling the grouping into subtypes and species. In this regard, there are two broad categories - the "gradualist" and the "revolutionary".²⁰

A. Gradualist Nationalisms:

These are typical of those post-independence groups which have achieved their nationalism. These can be sub-divided into the following sub-categories.

1. **State Nationalism:** This is found among ancient and well-developed states trying to weld their peoples into a more unified and patriotic lot. The emphasis here is on loyalty to the state rather than cohesion and autonomy of the nation.

20. This categorisation and the sub-categorisations that follow draw heavily from Anthony D. Smith's typologies of nationalist movements. See his edited work, Nationalist Movements, op.cit. especially, pp.2-5.

An extension of this is extra-territorial or expansionist nationalism which refers to the situation where a state extends its nationalism outside its own borders as was the case when Britain expanded into Ireland and other territories outside Europe. This type of nationalism feeds on the oppression of other nations which are still embryonic or weak. Usually, then, it leads to the marginalisation of the dominant classes of the conquered territories. In the era of capitalism, it further leads to the stifling of the growth of the petit-bourgeois classes of the oppressed nation and where it finds pre-capitalist social relations still existing, it tends to reinforce these production and property relations at the expense of authentic local capitalist development.

However, the situation is seldom static, for, as the emerging social classes in the colonised nation become conscious and organised, they invariably lead the resistance against the imperial masters. Generally, this policy has often proved a failure because it invariably provokes a counter and more thoroughgoing nationalist movement. The on-going nationalist struggles among various nationalities in Ethiopia vividly illustrate this point. Most of the nationalities in the southern part of the country had been conquered in the last

quarter of the 19th century. Having subjugated the peoples, the imperial state confiscated their land and "decapitated" the local leadership. During the reign of Haile Selassie, the socio-economic oppression of these "subject" peoples bred a conjunction of class and national contradictions which have now matured into thorough-going nationalist revolts.²¹

2. **Provincialism:** This arises in states formed by colonisation and are gradually fusing into nations. Such states never experienced a violent rupture but either quietly seceded or were given independence by their imperial masters. Examples include most of the former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.

B. Revolutionary Nationalisms:

These emerge from the radical and often violent efforts of their advocates and can be broken down into two sub-types.

1. **Ethnic nationalism:** develops among groups with a distinctive culture and history and operates exclusively on behalf of the ethnic group. The goals sought vary from local autonomy to outright independence. Examples

21. See John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978) especially, pp.23-29; and John W. Harbesen, "Socialist Politics in Revolutionary Ethiopia" in Carl G. Rosberg and Thomas M. Callaghy, Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Assessment (Berkeley, California: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1979) pp. 345-372.

of this include the Ogaden Somalis, Oromos and the Afars of Ethiopia. Its variants are:

(a) Renewal: This refers to a situation where a formally independent group seeks to renew or rejuvenate its social and political life. It is geared essentially towards maintaining the autonomy and restoring the identity and cohesion of a group that is declining or facing perceived external threats. The current stirrings in the Baltic republics of the Soviet Union—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are approximates of renewal nationalism.²²

(b) Secession: In this case, the Ethnic group is already part of a wider group such as an empire or multi-national state but seeks to sever the link through separation and set up its own state or restore (as in Poland and Hungary) an old one. Other examples include the abortive Biafran movement in Nigeria in the late 1960s, and the simmering "Kurdistan" struggle in Turkey (as well as in Iran and Iraq). Secession nationalism can also be broken down into a number of variants although all share the aspiration to set up a state coterminus with the ethnic group. A variant of this is irredentism

22. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Post-Communist Nationalism", Foreign Affairs Vol. 68 No. 5, Winter 1989/90 pp. 1-26; and Gail W. Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 68 No. 4, Fall 1989, pp. 92-108.

through which an already independent state seeks to redeem members of the ethnic group living under foreign authorities across its borders. The "Greater Somalia" policy of successive Somalia regimes is a most apposite example of irredentism.²³

Others, although somewhat exaggerated mutations of it, include the diaspora movement through which a scattered but culturally distinct group, such as the Jews, Armenians, Black Americans, desires to return to its alleged historic homeland. Moreover, there is also the 'pan' nationalisms such as Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism whose advocates seek to bring culturally similar independent states into a single super-state.²⁴

2. Territorial Nationalism: Broadly, this is based upon the territorial unit of heterogeneous population forcibly united and administered by a colonial power. In this case, the referents and marks of identification

23. On this dimension of Somali nationalism, see I.M. Lewis, A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa (London: Longman, 1980); Robert E. Gorelick, "Pan-Somalism US Territorial Integrity", Horn of Africa 3(4) 1980/81 pp. 31-36; and, Saadia Touval, Somali Nationalism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), and W. Michael Reisman, "Somali Self-determination in the Horn: Legal Perspectives and implications for social and political engineering" in I.M. Lewis (ed.), Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa (London: Ithaca Press, 1983).

24. See, for instance, the Advocacy of Kwame Nkrumah in his book, Africa Must Unite (New York: International Publishers, 1970), and, Ali A. Mazrui, Africa's International Relations (London: Heinemann, 1977) especially, pp. 68-84.

are the boundaries of the territory in which they inhabit and the administrative superstructure. Nationalism in this context is simply a resistance to foreign rule and oppression, otherwise known as anti-colonialism. A variant of this has emerged in multi-ethnic societies, where, despite the strategic dominance of one or more ethnic groups which spear-headed the nationalist movement, nationalism was conceived on the basis of the whole territorial unit. Examples of these include the role the Kikuyu and Buganda in the independence struggles in Kenya and Uganda respectively. The Eritrean movement also falls squarely into this 'mixed' variant of territorial nationalism.²⁵

Nationalist Movements and International Involvement

Very few states have attained nationhood without the intervention of radical nationalist movements. Such movements however vary in intensity, duration, extent, force and clarity. Those that exhibit these qualities in high degrees are more capable of forging a nation out of their population and those which lacked or are deficient on them hardly can make any impact on their population.

Some conditions are important for the formation of

²⁵ For further elaboration of these varieties of nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism op.cit., especially pp. 215-227.

effective nationalist movements.²⁶ These include:

(i) an easily identifiable territory and location, (ii) a single political authority and bureaucracy able to integrate or homogenise the people, (iii) a myth of common origins and history, (iv) other cultural differences like language or colour, (v) partial secularisation of urban elites' outlook and way of life, (vi) the growth of an urban intelligentsia, (vii) an alliance between the intelligentsia and one or more of the urban and rural classes, (viii) commercialisation and the rise of a mercantile order.

Essentially, the presence of most of these factors facilitates the development of a strong nationalist movement, and conversely, when these factors are absent or are not sufficiently demonstrated, the growth and development of the movement is weakened or retarded.

Nationalisms, therefore, can be placed on a continuum depending on their relative degrees of "development". In such classification, the following criteria are useful for determining whether a movement is developed or embryonic: (i) duration of the movement, (ii) organisation, (iii) diffusion of its ideals and activities among the people in its territorial unit, (iv) membership strength, (v) clarity, articulation and priority attached to its ideas and goals over other considerations, (vi)

26. These factors are a breakdown of Smith's "Framework of nationalism", which he subsumed under three categories: 'frameworks', 'bases' and 'bearers'. See his Nationalist Movements op.cit., pp.9-15.

dedication of its most advanced cadres. As Smith contends, these criteria can be condensed into four main components.²⁷

- (a) a political dimension involving organisation and institutionalisation;
- (b) a social one aimed at mobilising the people;
- (c) a cultural aspect concerned with creating and inculcating new values in the people;
- (d) a symbolic or mythic dimension in form of a system of beliefs and practices in which nationalism assumes a pseudo-religious dimension or faith.

The proficiency of a nationalist movement in these four areas determines whether it is 'developed' or embryonic.

Apart from these internal factors or conditions, international involvement is also integral to every nationalist movement which aspires to full separation or independence.²⁸ This is because both the nationalist movement and the incumbent authority have to engage external diplomatic and, at times, military support. If the legitimacy of the nationalist struggle is denied by foreign powers through the denial of support, the resources which the incumbent authority can call upon to suppress the movement is limitless. In most cases,

27. For an elaboration of these components, see, *Ibid.* pp.6-9.

28. See F.H. Hinsley, Nationalism and the International System. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973); and Hakan Wiberg, "Self-determination as an international issue", in I.M. Lewis (ed), Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa *op.cit.*, pp.52-93.

however, external support for the movement is easily activated because it invariably shares certain cultural, racial or ideological affinities with other groups across the borders and such transnational identities constitute its primary basis of foreign support and sanctuary. Moreover, even if it succeeds by force of arms, the recognition of other states is essential before it can participate as a bona-fide member of the family of nations. As such, the success of a movement for national self-determination is ultimately determined by external factors operating at the level of the international system as well as the perception and behaviour of foreign actors.

The Eritrean Question

For centuries past, Ethiopia has been a meeting place of peoples and cultures. It has therefore been a scene of continuing processes of assimilation and conflict arising from deep-seated national contradictions which have compounded its sense of national identity.²⁹ As a

29. See Donald N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Edmond J. Keller, "Ethiopia: Revolution Class and the National Question" African Affairs, 80, 1981, pp.519-549. On the Eritrean problem, see G.K.N. Tresvaskis Eritrea: A Colony in Transition: 1941-52 (London: Oxford University Press 1960); David Pool, Eritrea, Africa's Longest War (London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1982); Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Spokesman, Nottingham, 1980); Richard Sherman, Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1980); and, Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), The Long Struggle of Eritrea (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1989).

result, the national question had persistently dogged the Ethiopian empire-state, manifesting in periodic nationality conflicts in the Afar, Tigre, Oromo and Ogaden regions.

In 1962, the problem assumed a different dimension when the imperial Ethiopian regime forcibly annexed Eritrea thereby igniting the latter's struggle for self-determination - a problem which has remained resilient and, perhaps, the major dynamic in Ethiopian politics. Since it was federated with Ethiopia in 1952, Eritrea has proved to be the weakest link in the building of the nation. It is the touchstone of the national question as it is seen by Addis-Ababa as the key to the perpetuation or dismemberment of the Empire. Indeed, it has been the Achille's heel of successive Ethiopian regimes.³⁰

At the United Nations, the debate on Eritrea's future was a subject of intense international interest and as it assumed the dimension of an armed struggle for independence, it, once again, became an international issue. In the struggle over Eritrea, both the liberation movements and the Ethiopian regime have predictably

30. See Michael and Trish Johnson, "Eritrea: The National Question and the Logic of Protracted Struggle, African Affairs, 80, 1981 pp. 181-195.

solicited external support. Besides the imperative of external military, diplomatic, and financial assistance, the transnational ideological and racial affinities between the various factions of the Eritrean nationalist movement and diverse foreign actors have further brought external interests and considerations into the conflict. Moreover, Eritrea's strategic location on the Red Sea littoral has for long been an attraction to several foreign powers. In terms of historical and international significance, the Eritrean question bears striking parallels to the problem in Namibia and the Western Sahara. It has certainly assumed the dimension of a full-fledged nationalist movement with its own international profiles. According to Haggai Erlich:

Eritrea was a problem that became a conflict, a conflict that became a local tragedy and a local tragedy that became a pivotal issue in a regional crisis. This regional crisis gained global importance. Yet the initial problem was never resolved; on the contrary, it worsened over time.³¹

Examined in its local setting, the Eritrean issue is complex enough and set against international politics, it has become even more complicated. For, as twentieth century ideological and geopolitical considerations came

31. Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978: War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), p.1.

to overlay the real problem, international interests in it became heightened, thereby fuelling the continuing process of externalisation.

As an international issue, Eritrea is a crucial ingredient in the problem of the Horn of Africa which directly concerns Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. It also poses a thorny problem for the African and the global system. Right from its origin, therefore, external involvement has been a permanent feature precisely because the interests of local parties coincide with those of outside powers seeking influence, allies, clients and bases.

However, most works on Eritrea tended to view external involvement from the perspective of "intervention" and end up reinforcing the facile, but erroneous, impression that the local parties to the conflict are passive victims of competing foreign powers.³² Besides, the "intervention" thesis often neglects the concrete historical and material bases of the conflict and fails to show how these factors are intricately linked with diverse external actors and considerations. The overall

32. See, for instance, B.H. Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); Tom J. Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979); R.F. Gorman, Political Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger, 1981); and, Sherman, Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution.

objective of this study, then, is to bring out the historical and continuous connection between the internal contexts and the international dimensions of the Eritrean conflict.

Specifically, it seeks to explain and analyse the impact of external involvement in the Eritrean conflict. To this end, it will identify and explain the various external forces at the levels states, regional and global actors involved in the crisis.

The guiding hypothesis of this work is that when the national question assumes the form of a struggle for self-determination, it automatically becomes an international issue whose course is largely determined by external factors. The major assumptions behind this hypothesis are that:

- (i) as a conflict involving the goal of self-determination, the Eritrea problem logically and necessarily attracts international involvement;
- (ii) the degree of foreign involvement is a function of local factors - origin, scope and duration of the conflicts - as well as of external interests, conditions and considerations;
- (iii) while external actors seek to influence the course and outcome of the conflict to suit their own objectives, the local parties also influence external actors to bolster their positions;

- (iv) the nature of international involvement in a struggle for self-determination determines to a large extent the course and outcome of the conflict.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- (i) identify the historical roots and dynamics of the Eritrean conflict;
- (ii) examine the local antecedents to and the genesis of external involvement in the conflict;
- (iii) evince the linkages, perceptual and behavioural, between the local parties and actors in the external environment;
- (iv) determine, explain and analyse the variety, extent and nature of international influences; and,
- (v) assess the impact, consequences and implications of external involvement for the course and resolution of the conflict.

Motivation, Scope and Anticipated Contribution

International involvement in African conflicts is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, most of the disputes that currently plague the region, especially, those stemming from the national question have their antecedents in external factors and forces. The Eritrean question is not an exception. Yet, most observers continue to view it as an internal problem of Ethiopia, a position which fails to take cognisance of the concrete historical and objective bases of the problem and the role of external

interests and considerations.³³

The Eritrean struggle for self-determination is today Africa's longest war of independence. Ironically, and, until recently, it is perhaps the least known or talked about in both diplomatic and academic circles.³⁴

This neglect is perhaps due to the sustained attempt by Ethiopia to suppress the problem, often dismissing it as mere highway banditry.³⁵ The few studies available have been concerned with the historical background and internal dynamics of the conflict and very little effort has been made to evince the historical and dynamic links between the domestic bases and external dimensions of the conflict.³⁶ Others have also treated it as an adjunct

33. This has all along been the position of the OAU and most American Ethiopianists like J.H. Spencer, see for instance, his "Haile Selassie? Triumph and Tragedy", ORBIS XVIII (4) Winter, 1975, pp.1129-1140.

34. See David Pool, Eritrea: Africa's Longest War; Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds), Behind the War in Eritrea.

35. Both the Emperor and Mengistu often dismissed the Eritreans forces as Shifita - (highway bandits) - depicting them as bloodthirsty robbers. See J.F. Campbell, "Rumblings along the Red Sea: The Eritrean Question" 48(3) 1970, pp.537-548. As well, see Mengistu's Speech at the Launching of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 in Colin Legum (ed.), Africa Contemporary (London: Rex Collings) 1984/85, p. B233-4 (hereafter, A.C.R.).

36. The most authoritative and widely consulted are, Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds) Behind the War in Eritrea; Richard Sherman, Eritrea: the Unfinished Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1980); and, David Pool, Eritrea, Africa's Longest War.

to the wider regional and global geopolitical and strategic forces at play in the Horn of Africa. In such works, the Eritrean question is held as a constant variable and the local combatants treated as passive victims of foreign powers.³⁷

The motivation of this study, then, stems from the urge to contribute to the better knowledge of international aspects of the Eritrean-Ethiopia conflict. Along this line, ^{the} study seeks to demonstrate that (i) as a struggle for national self-determination, the Eritrean question is, per force, an international issue; (ii) international involvement is as much a product of external interests and forces as it is of internal needs and considerations; (iii) contrary to the tendency by scholars to treat the local parties as passive victims of foreign intervention, the disputants themselves actively seek foreign assistance to bolster their positions; (iv) internationalisation is a dynamic process constantly reflecting changes in the internal conditions of the disputants and those of foreign actors in the international environment; (v) the differential impact of the international system on local conflicts is a function of the

37. See for instance, Tom J. Farer, War Clouds in the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm; Beresket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa and R.F. Gorman, Political Conflict in the Horn of Africa; op.cit.

origin, scope and duration of the conflict as well as of the changing interests of foreign actors in the external environment.

Hence, to capture the incidence of internationalisation in this concrete situation, analysis will demonstrate the concrete historical and dynamic links between the domestic contexts of the conflict and international forces and interests at play. By so doing, it will be possible to explain and analyse in what way(s) the international system treats the Eritrean struggle.

Background to the Problem:

The 'national question' has been and remains the most prominent among the problems of the African continent. Indeed, no other issue has generated as much conflict and concern in African political life.³⁸ The origin of this problem dates back to the emergence of state formations in pre-colonial times. During this period, while related ethnic groups were united into bigger nationalities, others broke apart and were assimilated by more developed neighbours. This ethnic mixing and merging generated considerable conflicts in several parts

38. R.N. Ismagilova, Ethnic Problems of The Tropical Africa (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978); Colin Legum, "Communal Conflict and International Intervention in Africa" in Colin Legum et al, Africa in the 1980s op.cit. pp.23-66. See, also, Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola (eds), State versus Ethnic Claims op.cit.

of the continent.³⁹

More recently, in the wake of the European scramble for Africa towards the end of the last century, colonies were constituted by arbitrary dissection and merger of different ethnic entities.⁴⁰ Thus, unlike the European States which were constituted on the basis of historically evolved cultural-linguistic groups, this was not usually the case in Africa. In the process of colonial penetration, the imperialist powers dismantled already consolidated state formations, broke up long-standing socio-political ties and created new administrative units which cut across long-established frontiers. In effect, many African nations were summarily dismembered. As Lewis puts it, this "balkanization" of Africa produced "Hapsburg-style states comprising a medley of peoples and ethnic groups lumped together within frontiers which paid no respect to traditional cultural contours".⁴¹ This fact

39. See, Basil Davidson, The African Past (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, The Universal Library, 1967); and Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1978).

40. On Colonialism and Its Impact on Africa's Political and Socio-Economic Structures, see, Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (London: Bogle L' Ouverture, 1972); L.H. Gann and P. Duignan (eds.), Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960 (Vol.1) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and Chinweizu, The West and the Rest of Us (London: NOK Publishers, 1978).

41. I.M. Lewis, Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa, (London: Ithaca Press, 1983) p.73.

was brutally manifested in the case of the Somali people who, for instance, were fragmented into five colonial parts: one in Djibouti, under the French; one, the Ogaden, under Ethiopia; another, Somalia, under Italy; and the other two under the British, in British Somaliland and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

Moreover, during the colonial period, pre-existing distinctions between groups were sharpened by other factors stemming from the uneven impact of colonial rule. Under a deliberate policy of divide and rule, the colonial powers adopted discriminatory policies and stressed racial, religious and ethnic differences.⁴² In fact, they viewed the development of national loyalties as a threat to their authority. However, the broad anti-colonial movement helped to forge a unity of interests among the peoples of each colony, thus temporarily overshadowing the various differences among the people.

At independence, the emergent African states were all set up within the boundaries demarcated by the colonial masters and this situation soon brought the national question to the fore. And, as political and economic decay set in to ripen the convergence of contradictions, the problem became exacerbated. As a result of the economic contraction in the post-colonial era, jobs, opportunities and resources decreased, leading to

42. See, for instance, R.N. Ismagilova, op.cit.

increased gaps between classes and nationalities. The resolution of these contradictions, often by coercive means, thus became a major preoccupation of many governments. In several African countries, then, class and national divisions merged to produce an explosion whose violence is yet to subside.⁴³ Perhaps, nowhere in Africa is this better dramatised than in contemporary Ethiopia.

Situated in the horn of east Africa just above the equator, Ethiopia has an area of roughly 450,000 square miles and a population of 42 million. It is bounded on the West and Northwest by Sudan, on the north by the Red Sea, on the East and South East by Djibouti and Somalia respectively, on the South by Kenya. Formerly entirely landlocked, it acquired a seacoast when it was joined with Eritrea under a federal arrangement by the United Nations in 1952.⁴⁴

In its topography, climate, languages, peoples and customs, Ethiopia is a country of great diversity. Although various Ethiopian states could be identified from the first century A.D., with wide variations in

43. See, Claude Ake, Revolutionary Pressures in Africa (London: Zed Press, 1978); and Timothy M. Shaw, "Ethnicity as the Resilient Paradigm for Africa from the 1980s" Race and Class, 17(4) October 1986, pp.587-606.

44. See R.F. Gorman, Political Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger, 1981); Richard Greefield, Ethiopia: A New Political History (New York: Praeger, 1965); and Joseph E. Harris, Pillars in Ethiopian History (Washington D.C. Howard University Press, 1974).

authority and frontiers, most observers and Ethiopianists agree that it had its origin as a result of the influx of semitic tribes from southern Arabia to the Abyssinian highlands sometime in the first millenium B.C.⁴⁵

According to this account, the migrants subsequently absorbed by intermarriage and by imposing their semitic culture on the basically Hamitic peoples they found there who, in turn, had much earlier displaced a predominantly Negro culture. In the 14th century, Islamic Somali tribes invaded the highlands followed by the Galla migrants in the 16th century.

Between the mid-18th and 19th centuries, Ethiopia scarcely had stable central government. For most of the period, it frequently lapsed into what has been described as the "Era of Princes". However, a process of rebirth of the nation and state began under Emperor Tewodros (1855-69) with a militant attachment to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as expansionist nationalism. Thus, towards

45. For relevant historical perspectives on the evolution of Ethiopian State, see Donald N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Ernest W. Luther, Ethiopia Today (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958). See, also, Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and, John W. Harbeson, The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post-Imperial State (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

the end of the 19th century, more "foreign" peoples over which the old Ethiopian state had never exercised authority were incorporated into the empire. Indeed, the reign of Emperor Menelik II was marked by notable expansion and establishment of effective control over other peoples like the Afars and Oromos.⁴⁶

Also, when frontiers were being provisionally demarcated between Ethiopia on the one hand, Britain and France on the other, large numbers of Somalis and other non-Amharic speakers were brought within the boundaries of Ethiopia, including areas over which the Ethiopian regime exercised little or no control. For instance, before 1935, Ethiopian control over the Somalis of the Ogaden had been slight and spasmodic and it was not until after British withdrawal in 1947 that Ethiopia began to take active interest in the area. Even then, its authority was felt largely in the towns while the rural people continued their traditional way of life only to be disturbed by the occasional foray of Ethiopian troops. This was also the general situation in several parts of the country particularly in Tigre, Bale, and Afar areas. This occasional assertion of authority frequently served to further estrange the non-Amharic

46. See Donald N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia op.cit.

nationalities from the Ethiopian state.

Another source of disenchantment was the historically evolved socio-economic structure in which the peasants, particularly those of the non-Amharic nationalities, were subjected to severe oppression and exploitation. In the hey days of the feudal regime, the peasant was the veritable source of appropriation of surplus for the aristocracy, nobility and the state. In practical terms, the peasant was the landlord's servant. Already rendered landless, he ploughed, weeded, harvested and handed the produce to his lord. Given the dominant position of the Amhara ethnic group within the state and the subordination of other nationalities to the Amharic culture, there emerged a coincidence of class and national contradictions which erupted into endemic peasant (as it were, nationality) revolts in the 1940s and 50s. Progressively, these revolts turned into organised and successful provincial ('nationalist') uprisings against state authority, thereby bringing the national question into bolder relief.⁴⁷ The situation

47. On the origins and development of Eritrean nationalism, see Yordanos Gebre-Medhin, "Nationalism and the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea", Review of African Political Economy, September, 1984 pp. 48-57; and David Pool, "Eritrean Nationalism" in I.M. Lewis, Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa (London: Ithaca Press, 1989) pp.175-193.

would be further compounded with the federation, and later, annexation of Eritrea to the empire.

With a population of about 4 million and an area of 119,000 square kilometres, stretching for some 200 kilometres along the Red Sea coastline, Eritrea faces Saudi Arabia and Yemen across the water and is squeezed between Ethiopia and Sudan. Composed of diverse linguistic and ethnic groupings each of which has its own distinct cultural forms, Eritrea itself is far from being homogeneous. Historically, the people were never under a unified administration. This situation however changed with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which revived external interest in the areas. Thus, in the wake of European colonial scramble for Africa, it became an Italian colony in 1889 and after 1935 was administered with Ethiopia by Italy until 1941 when Italian imperialism was defeated in the Horn of Africa. From 1942, it came under a provisional (military) administration which was instituted by Britain. Then in 1952, it was federated with Ethiopia by a United Nations action.⁴⁸

Although the United Nations resolution provided for an autonomous Eritrean government with legislative executive

48. See Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket N. Selassie, Behind the War in Eritrea; and David Pool, Eritrea, Africa's Longest War.

and judicial powers over domestic affairs, this provision was rendered nugatory almost immediately by the imperial regime in Addis Ababa. As Emperor Haile Selassie embarked on imperial measures aimed at strengthening the Ethiopian state, he encroached on the powers and autonomy of the Eritrean government. In 1962, the imperial regime abrogated the federation and annexed Eritrea as a province of Ethiopia, a move which completely eliminated what was left of the autonomous status envisaged by the United Nations action. The dissolution of the federation was accompanied by widespread infringements of the rights of the Eritrean people and their leaders and the subjugation of their cultures to the dominant Amharic culture.⁴⁹

Consequently, there gradually emerged protests and groupings organised along nationalist lines and culminating in the development of militant political (national) consciousness among Eritreans. The ensuing nationalist agitations culminated in the formation of Eritrean Liberation Front in 1961 and the commencement of armed

49. See John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978); and, Richard Sherman, Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolutions, op.cit.

insurgency against the Ethiopian State.⁵⁰

Right from its origin, the Eritrean problem has been compounded by external factors and pressures. Because of the congruity of racial and religious, and to some extent, ideological affinity between a significant section of the Eritrean movement and some Sudanese people and the Arabs of the Middle East, the problem has, over the years assumed regional as well as extra-regional profiles. Thus, far from being a narrowly local issue, it has become interwoven with external interests and factors.⁵¹

Moreover, and most importantly, is Eritrea's geopolitical circumstance. By its location, it is a potent strategic and geopolitical magnet. It lies adjacent to the Middle East and the Red Sea whose entrance it effectively commands. In addition, it borders the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. As it were, over the years, the area has been important in the strategic and

50. See the collection in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie (ed), Behind the War in Eritrea op.cit.; and Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa op.cit. especially, pp. 11-97.

51. On the external complications of the national question, see, Frank Boyce, "The Internationalizing of Internal War: Ethiopia, the Arabs and the Case of Eritrea. Journal of International and Comparative Studies 5(3) Fall, 1972 pp. 51-73; James Mayall, The World Today, "The National Question: The Horn of Africa", 39(9), September 1983, pp. 338-345.

geopolitical considerations of the great powers and, more recently, the super powers.⁵² Also, due to Ethiopia's proximity to the Middle East, and other racial, ideological and political affinities between the Arab speaking and Muslim population of Eritrea and the Arab world, the Eritrean question has become caught up in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the circumstance, while some of the Arabs support the Eritrean struggle (in varying degrees and frequency) Israel has taken the side of the Ethiopian state.⁵³

Finally, the liberation movements themselves have directly courted external forces by their religious and ideological exhortation and the exigency of financial, diplomatic and military support and, in so doing, contributed to the externalisation of the problem.⁵⁴ In the same vein, the Ethiopian regime also solicits external support for its attempt to contain the Eritrean movement. Indeed, for the past three decades, Addis Ababa has been able to contain the Eritrean insurgency mainly through

52. Mordechai Abir, "Red Sea Politics" in Conflict in Africa, Adelphi Papers, No.93, (London: The International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1972).

53. Ibid.

54. Raman G. Bhardwaj, "The Growing Externalization of the Eritrean Movement" Horn of Africa Vol.2 No.1 January/March, 1979.

sustained and active cultivation of foreign support.⁵⁵

An Annotated Review of Relevant Literature

The national question is a very old issue, and so is the academic concern with it. In the past, the problem was often reduced to the prejudices stemming from inter-ethnic antagonisms borne out of the peculiarities of people's psychological habit of mind. With time, however, this explanation premised on psychoanalysis was repudiated.⁵⁶ The first attempt at a material explanation was made by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels who traced its roots to the contradictions arising from exploitation between classes and nations. Indeed, the national question had captured the attention of the earliest Marxist intellectuals and was hotly debated at the beginning of this century.

In classical Marxist thought, the issue is of secondary importance, being subordinate to the class struggle from which it cannot be isolated. As Marx and Engels contended:

55. Between 1953 and 1974, Ethiopia was the largest recipient of American military aid to Black Africa and a significant portion of this assistance was for counter-insurgency operations. As well, since the shift of international alignments in the Horn in 1977, the Mengistu regime has solicited and received massive Soviet-bloc military assistance. For details, see Chapter 5 below: Roles of the Superpowers and other Extra-regional Actors in the Eritrean Conflict.

56. For an overview and critique of this earlier perspective, see R.N. Ismagilova, Ethnic Problems of Tropical Africa, pp.79-96.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility between one nation to another will come to an end.⁵⁷

What Marx and Engels did was to show the dialectical relationship of the national question with proletarian internationalism arguing that only the liberation of the oppressed nation enables national divisions and antagonisms to be overcome.

Most of the early Marxist postulations, however, were concerned with specific situations where there was a compelling need to make rapid decisions. As a result, classical Marxism did not offer a systematic explanation of the national question and this accounts for wide variations from one Marxist writer to the other. For instance, although Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky were against national oppression, they stressed class over national interest because, for them, nationalism was an impediment to internationalism.⁵⁸

57. Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, Collected Works, Vol.6, p.503.

58. For comprehensive and critical perspectives on Marxist thoughts on the national question, see Regis Debray, "Marxism and the Nation" New Left Review, No.105, September-October 1977, pp.25-41; Michael Lowy, "Marxists and the National Question", New Left Review, 96, March-April, 1976 pp.81-100; Walker Connor, The National Question in Marxist Leninist Theory and Strategy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Ronaldo Munck, The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism (London: Zed Press, 1986).

Lenin's position, on the other hand, is somewhat different and has come to be accepted as the core of Marxist-Leninist position. In fact, the national question is one of the areas in which Lenin made tremendous contribution to Marxist theory. He set out by rejecting the classical accounts which reduced the nation either to economics or culture.⁵⁹ Unlike the earlier Marxist theorists who emphasised either the economic, cultural or psychological dimension of the problem, Lenin posited that the question belongs wholly and exclusively to the realm of politics. For him, therefore, the political aspect of the problem is the most vital. Accordingly, he was for the "freedom of association, including the association of any communities no matter what their nationality in any given state".⁶⁰

Moreover, Lenin sought to reconcile the national and class forces. He was for self-determination first, and proletarian internationalism second. As he argued, only the freedom to secede, that is, the right of political secession and the establishment of an independent nation-state makes possible free and voluntary union, association, and, in the long run, fusion of nations.

59. See V.I. Lenin, "The National Question in our Programme" Collected Works, Vol.6 (Moscow; published 1961) pp.454-463; "Critical Remarks on the National Question", Collected Works Vol.20 (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1964).

60. V.I. Lenin, "The National Programme of the RSDLP", Collected Works, Vol. 19, p.543.

He concludes:

The Marxist programme ... advocates, firstly, the equality of nations and languages and impermissibility of all privileges in this respect ... and the right of nations to self determination, secondly, the principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against the contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism.⁶¹

Regarding the distinctive incidence of the problem in under-developed, "backward" societies, Lenin contended that "small agricultural production, patriachalism and ignorance inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, viz. "national egoism and national narrowness". He, therefore, maintained that these prejudices cannot disappear unless the "whole foundation of the economic life of the backward countries has radically changed."⁶²

In Africa, the dominant perspective on the national problem has come from the modernisation school. In the post-colonial period of the 1960s, the Africanist wing of the modernisation school sought to explain the dynamics of political conflicts and resolutions by pointing to ethnicity as the most salient explanatory variable. The national question, then, was addressed within the context

61. Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Questions, Collected Works Vol.20, p.27.

62. Lenin, "The National Question in our Programme", op.cit., pp.454-63.

of political change and development. These scholars tended to view it as a product of ethnic affinities which is primordially based, and as a problem natural to all traditional or transitional societies and which will disappear in the course of political development.⁶³

On the whole, modernisation theorists traced the problem to certain "natural" factors which Geertz referred to as "the congruity of blood, speech and custom". According to this perspective, the problem arises from attachment to primordial loyalties, that is, those features of existence that stem from being "born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language or even a dialect of a language and following particular social practices".

As Geertz contended:

... for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow from a sense of nature - some would say - spiritual affinity than from social interaction.⁶⁴

63. On the 'modernisation' perspective, see the collections in J.L. Finkle and R.W. Gable (ed) Political Development and Social Change (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1966).

64. Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", Clifford Geertz (ed), Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 105-157; also appeared with the same title in an abridged form in Finkle and Gable (eds); op.cit. pp. 655-669 at p.656.

With the emphasis on such factors as race, language and culture, the national question is seen within the narrow context of creating a sense of territorial nationality which subordinates specific, particular and familiar identifications.⁶⁵ The works of Nelson Kasfir and Archie Mafeje offer an expose and critique of the major strands in this perspective.⁶⁶ There is, however, a more recent intellectual tradition which traces the roots of the problem to the historical and contemporary socio-economic foundations of African states. This school emphasises factors such as imperialism, class and national oppression and inequalities which arise from production and property relations. It further points to the unevenness in socio-economic development among nationalities in several countries which resulted largely from the discriminatory policies pursued by the erstwhile imperialist masters.⁶⁷ In respect of the study of the Ethiopian problem, this latter perspective has

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65. Finkle and Gabile, op.cit.; Claude Ake, A Theory of Political Integration (Homewood, Ill: The Dorsey Press, 1967).
66. Nelson Kasfir, "Explaining Ethnic Political Participation" World Politics Vol.31 No.3, 1978/79, pp.365-88; Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of Tribalism" Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.9, No.2, August 1971, pp.253-62
67. See, for instance, B.V. Andrianov, "The Specific Character of Ethnic Processes in African Countries" in I.R. Grigulevich and S.Ya. Kozlov (ed) Ethnocultural Processes and National Problems in the Modern World, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979) pp.291-308; Timothy M. Shaw, "Ethnicity as the Resilient Paradigm for Africa from the 1960s to the 1980", op.cit.

had tremendous impact.

The works of Halliday,⁶⁸ Markakis and Ayele,⁶⁹ and Bondestam⁷⁰ are representative of this orientation. In their contributions, Bondestam, Markakis and Ayele traced the problem to the expropriation of peasants of the non-Amharic nationalities as well as the contradictions arising from centralising measures of the defunct imperial regime designed to strengthen the then tottering Ethiopian state. While Bondestam argued that socio-economic changes under the Selassie regime did not proceed enough for class consciousness to counteract primordial ethnic sentiments, Markakis and Ayele contended that the conditions favoured the rise of class consciousness and struggle even though this remained dormant for a long time. They also point to the convergence of class and national contradictions resulting from feudalism and the subordination of other nationalities to the Amharas. In this regard, Addis Hiwet has also made a profound contribution. In his book, he traced the roots of the national question to the material and historical forces that led to formation of the Ethiopian

68. Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea" New Left Review, May/June, 1971, pp.57-67.

69. John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978).

70. Lars Bondestam, "People and Capitalism in North Eastern Lowlands of Ethiopia" Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.12, No.3, 1974, pp. 423-433.

state. As he posits, state formation in Ethiopia was tantamount to "military-feudal-colonialism" resulting in extensive confiscation of land and alienation of the peoples of subject nationalities. His work thus evinces the concrete link between feudal landlordism and national oppression.⁷¹

On Eritrean nationalism, Pool, Gebre-Medhin,⁷² among others, have linked the development to peasant politics and the struggle against feudalism and national oppression. In any case, most writers readily appreciate the unique historical context of the Eritrean problem as distinct from say, Oromo or Tigre nationalism either of which may oscillate between the 'renewal' and 'secessionist' variants of ethnic nationalisms. In their own context, that is the Oromos and Tigreans, national consciousness was a consequence of the feudal and centralised administration by Addis-Ababa which tended to ignore and virtually obliterate local differences of custom and culture.

71. Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution, (London: Review of African Political Economy, Occasional Publications, no.1, 1975).

72. David Pool, "Eritrean Nationalism", in I.M. Lewis (ed), Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa, op.cit. pp. 175-193; Yordanos Gebre-Medhin, "Nationalism, Peasant Politics and the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea", Review of African Political Economy, op.cit.

In the hey days of the ancient regime, these non-Amharic peoples were subjected to severe exploitation and their lands alienated to Amhara settlers who acted like veritable colonial officials. Atop this, the Oromos, for instance, were denied the basic essentials of their national identity and subjugated to forced Amharisation. Baxter, who had a considerable field experience in Ethiopia, has given a vivid account of just an incidence of the problem:

Until the final days of the empire, Oromo language was denied any official status and it was not permissible to publish, preach, teach or broadcast in any Oromo dialect. In court or before an official, an Oromo had to speak Amharinya or use an interpreter. Even a case between two Oromos before an Oromo speaking magistrate had to be heard in Amharinya. I sat through a mission service at which the preacher and all the congregation were Oromo but at which the sermon, as well as the service was given first in Amharinya, which a few of the congregation understood at all, and then translated into Oromo.⁷³

Essentially, then, the wider national question in Ethiopia, that is the nationalities problem in Oromo, Tigre, Afar, Sidamo and other areas, is a problem of the relationship between the central government (or the ruling group) and the non-Amharic communities manifested

73. P.T.W. Baxter, "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo", African Affairs, Vol.77, No.308, 1978, pp.283-296, at p.288. For more details on the exploitation and oppression of the 'subject' nationalities, see, John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, op.cit.; especially pp. 21-29.

in a center-periphery gap which denies the local communities or 'minorities' access to vital state resources and structures. For these people, nationalism has been a product of resentment to psychic and material deprivations expressed through sporadic rebellions.

In the 1970s and 80s, however, a greater feeling of nationality had become discernible among the various nationalities leading to the formation of full-fledged nationalist movements such as the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), the tottering Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Afar Liberation Front (ALF). And, to underscore the essentially 'ethnic' character of these nationalist responses, Baxter has drawn a most apposite parallel between the Oromo, Somali and the Biafran movements all which are more or less rooted in a common language, shared feelings and values.⁷⁴

Notwithstanding the coincidence of the Eritrean problem and the general national question in Ethiopia, therefore, the former, as Gebre-Medhin suggests, is different both in substance and its historical circumstances.⁷⁵ Clapham, a keen Ethiopianist who has worked on the nationalities issue also shares this contention.

74. Ibid., p.291.

75. Yordonos Gebre-Medhin, "Eritrea: Background to Revolution", Monthly Review, 28(4) September 1976, pp.52-61.

In his words:

Eritrea is in a class of its own both because of its legacy of colonialism and political party activity and because of its anti-Ethiopia guerilla movement which has obtained substantial Arab support.⁷⁶

Hence, to underscore the uniqueness of the Eritrean problem, it is otherwise referred to as the "national-colonial" question.⁷⁷

In respect of the international dimensions of the Eritrean question much of the available literature is focused on external geo-political and strategic aspects of the problem. Too often, then, the emphasis on (external) strategic factors presents just one side of the problem and fails to come to grips with the international dynamics of the conflict and the way these have conditioned, and are in turn affected, by external factors. While Mayall, Howell and Lewis⁷⁸ examined the regional aspects and implications of the problem, others like Schwab, Remnek and Simes take a "globalist" approach to the

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76. Christopher Clapham, "Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia", African Affairs 74 (294), January 1975, pp. 72-81, at p.74.
77. Sally Healy, "The Changing Idiom of Self-determination in the Horn of Africa" in I.M. Lewis (ed.), Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa, pp. 93-109.
78. James Mayall, "The National Question in the Horn of Africa", The World Today, Vol.39, No.9, September 1983, pp. 338-345; John Howell, "Horn of Africa: Lessons from Sudan Conflict" International Affairs, Vol.54, No.3, July 1978, pp. 421-436, and I.M. Lewis (ed.), op.cit.

crisis,⁷⁹ tending to play upon global-strategic factors particularly as these affect the position of foreign actors in the conflict. For them, therefore, international involvement, or what is usually conceptualised as "intervention", is a strategic (external) imperative, emanating from foreign interests. Overall, there is the manifest tendency to treat international aspects of the conflict separately from the national question itself, and, in so doing, the local conflict is held as a constant variable, while the two are analysed as two distinct sets of phenomena. Selassie's work is eminently representative of this tradition.⁸⁰

Yet, as Rosenau cautioned long ago, the international aspects of a conflict should not be examined apart from the dispute that fosters them. For, as he contends, there exists a complex and continuous interplay between domestic and external sets of factors which an analyst must take into consideration because, in his words, "what happens abroad is inescapably a function of what happens

79. Peter Schwab, "Cold War on the Horn of Africa", African Affairs, Vol.77, No.306 January 1978; Richard Remnek, Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa: The Decision to Intervene (Alexandria, Va: Center for Naval Analysis, 1980) and, Dimitri Simes, Implications of Soviet and Cuban Activities in Africa for U.S. Policy (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1979).

80. H.B. Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa op.cit.; See, also, S. Neil MacFarlane, "Africa's Decaying Security System and the Rise of Intervention", International Security, Vol.4, No.8, Spring 1984, pp.127-

in strife-ridden societies and conversely the dynamics of internal wars are conditioned, perhaps even sustained by external events".⁸¹

Except for Bwardwaj who tried to examine the local roots or context of external involvement,⁸² most observers of the Eritrean problem appear to have paid little regard to Rosenau's injunctions. This study therefore, will depart from the "intervention" thesis which runs through most available materials. The objective is to demonstrate that as a struggle for national self determination, the Eritrean problem logically and necessarily has external components. To this end, it will explore the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces focusing on the behavioural and perceptual linkages between the local parties and actors in the external environment.⁸³

Method of Enquiry

This research begins with a survey of secondary materials dealing with the two complementary aspects of the problem. Using content analysis, the survey covered

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81. James N. Rosenau, "Introduction", in James N. Rosenau (ed.) International Aspects of Civil Strife (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, p.1.
 82. Raman G. Bhardwaj, "The Growing Externalization of the Eritrean Movement op.cit.
 83. On the internal-external linkages, see, James N. Rosenau, "International Aspects of Internal War: A Working Paper" in his collection, International Aspects of Civil Strife. pp. 289-311.

published books and journals, yearbooks, periodicals and newspapers. Such materials were found in the libraries of Obafemi Awolowo University and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Nigeria; the British Library and others in ^{the} University of Sussex and the School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, in the United Kingdom; as well as George Washington University in Washington, D.C. In addition, official documents were consulted in the Public Records Office in London, the Library of Congress in the Washington D.C., as well as the Ethiopian embassy in Lagos.

Other ^{sources} ~~sources~~ ^{include} publications of the Eritrean movement and the records of the United Nations Organisation were also consulted. Of course, most of the Ethiopian government's publications as well as those of the liberation movement contained a great deal of propaganda. However, the study is based on many types of sources including as much of the available written materials on the problem and, as such, analysis was preceded by an extensive and cautious perusal of facts not based on one source but on weighing of claims and information from diverse sources.

Thus, apart from library and archival sources in Nigeria, United Kingdom and the United States where relevant historical data on the roots of the conflict

and antecedents to external involvement were obtained, infrential evidences were also gleaned from interviews conducted with and questionnaires sent to key officials of the Eritrean and Ethiopian parties. While interviews were conducted with relevant Eritrean and Ethiopian officials in London and Lagos, questionnaires were mailed to other key functionaries of the EPLF and the Ethiopian government through the Eritrean Information service and the EPLF's Europe office in London as well as the Ethiopian mission in Lagos. Other views were sought through corespondence with relevant diplomatic representatives based in the Ethiopian capital. Such "third party" sources were useful for weighing the claims of the disputants and for crosschecking other information gathered in the course of this enquiry. Questions were asked about external ties and identifications (of both sides), changes in external orientation and links and reasons for such, sources of diplomatic and military assistance and impact of such assistance. The enquiry also focused on other forms of international involvement such as peace initiatives. Moreover, respondents were asked for their recipe for the resolution of the conflict and if they thought the international community

has any role to play in the resolution.⁸⁴

The objective of this particular research method is to collect data which would sufficiently and specifically establish the following:

- (i) nature and origins of the Eritrean problem;
- (ii) genesis of international involvement in the conflict;
- (iii) domestic and external bases of international alignments;
- (iv) major external actors and degree of involvement;
- (v) pattern of international involvement and implications for the resolution of the conflict.

Framework of Analysis

The approach adopted in this study is empirical and analytical. Along this line, the study examines relevant domestic and external factors that have internationalised the Eritrean conflict. Resort is made to George Modelski's framework - "International Relations of Internal War" - for understanding and explanation of the subject-matter.⁸⁵

Modelski's framework is chosen because it offers a perspective which underscores the dynamic and mutual interplay between the internal and external factors in a conflict. It also offers a check-list of elements for explaining and

84. See Appendix II

85. George Modelski, "The International Relations of Internal War" in James N. Rosenau (ed.), International Aspects of Civil Strife op.cit., pp.14-44.

analysing the process of internationalisation of conflict. This framework is preferred to the usual conceptualisation of external involvement in local conflicts as intervention. As earlier stated, this "intervention" perspective is inadequate for a number of reasons. First, it is laden with normative, legalistic and strategic considerations.⁸⁶ Second, and as Rosenau pointed out,⁸⁷ it is beclouded by overtones of morality and vague definitional practices which make a systematic processing of data pertaining to a conflict very cumbersome. Moreover, it is narrow and restrictive as, too often, the emphasis is on the external variables while the local context is taken for granted and left untreated.⁸⁸ Other perspectives on externalisation such

86. See Roland J. Stanger (ed) Essays on Intervention (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964); and Manfred Halpern "The Morality and Politics of Intervention", in Rosenau (ed), International Aspects of Civil Strife, pp.249-288.

87. See J.N. Rosenau, "Intervention as a Scientific Concept" in J.N. Rosenau The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy (New York: Free Press, 1971) pp. 275-303.

88. See, for instance, the works of Arthur Gavshon, Crisis in Africa: Battleground of East and West; Raymond W. Copson, "African Flashpoints: Prospects for armed international conflict", ORBIS, Vol.24, No.4, 1982, pp.903-923; and Peter Schwab, "Cold War in the Horn of Africa". Cf. I. William Zartman, Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa; and, Henry Bienen, "Perspectives on Soviet Intervention in Africa", Political Quarterly, Vol.95, No.1, Spring 1980, pp.29-42.

as "projection" or "conflict-linkage" are equally unsuitable for the study of nationalist conflicts. Being concerned essentially with the linkage between internal disruption and external belligerence, the projection model treats externalisation as a process by which states conteract internal tensions through resort to foreign adventures. Projection theorists generally proceed from a common premise—that externalisation occurs when a regime seeks to divert a disaffected populace from domestic grievances towards an ostensible foreign menace with a view to regaining internal cohesion and support.⁸⁹

Apart from its narrow premise, there are other limitations which make the projection or conflict-linkage model inapplicable to the study of nationalist insurgency such as the Eritrean case. In the first place, it is only suited for largely uncoordinated internal tensions or uprising - a far cry from nationalist or

89. For perspectives on the "projection" or "conflict-linkage" model, see, Lewis A. Coser, The functions of Social Conflict (New York: Free Press, 1956); Robert Gurr (ed.) Handbook of Political Conflict: Theory and Research (New York: Free Press, 1980) Jonathan W. Wilkenfeld, Conflict Behaviour and Linkage Politics (New York: David McKay, 1973); Me Melvin Small and J. David Singer (eds), Internal War: An Anthology and Study Guide (Homewood, III: Dorsey Press, 1985); and Patrick James, "Externalisation of Conflict: Testing a Crisis-Based Model", Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol. XX, No. 3, September 1987, pp. 573-598.

structural conflicts which strike at the very survival of the state as an entity. Second, and closely related to the above, is the palpable assumption that all within the state accept its authority and existence and would therefore be predisposed to suspend their immediate grudges (against the state) and face the enemy or threat from outside. Moreover, the focus and emphasis are on the behaviour and perception of the incumbent - regime ~~or state actor~~ - to the neglect of the opponents, and the dynamics of the internal conflict. Based on Modelski's approach, it is hoped that this study will overcome the shortcomings associated with these other models.

The simple premise of Modelski's framework is that internal wars necessarily acquire external components because they occur not only within a political system but also within an international system.⁹⁰ It further posits that in a conflict situation, the essential features of the political system, (authority, solidarity, resources, culture and communication) split into two sets. One, already established by the incumbent regime, and the other, to be acquired and developed by the nationalist movement if it seeks to approximate or supplant the existing state structures. These two sets of political

90. Modelski, op.cit., p.18.

structures which constitute the "structures of internal war" can, according to Modelski be categorised into four:⁹¹

(i) Structure of Authority: This refers to the decision-making machinery and political leadership of both parties. The authority structures of both sides are necessarily exposed to international influences because the political leadership must operate within networks of external relationships that make up the international system. While the incumbents already have foreign representations and ties, the insurgent movement must strive to acquire its own foreign connections. Usually, the leaders of the movement gain such connections during periods of exile. Also, in the course of the war, they must articulate a foreign policy and cultivate relationships with foreign powers. As such, recruitment into certain leadership positions tend to favour those with foreign exposure and connections.

(ii) Structure of Solidarity: This refers to the "reference group" or "political community" with which parties to the conflict identify. According to Modelski, "it comprises all those united in interest with either the incumbents or insurgents". The reference group constitutes the potential source of external support and its

91. Ibid., pp. 15-17.

Components include foreign governments, organisations and political parties with which parties to the conflict are affiliated.

(iii) Structure of Resources: For both parties, the structure of resources extend beyond the frontiers of the conflict. The external components of this structure include foreign bases, external military and financial aid. While the incumbents attract aid from allies, friends and commercial partners, the external resource base is most crucial for the insurgents because it represents that portion of their resources well beyond the purview of the incumbents.

(iv) Structure of Culture and Communications: For both parties, the cultural connections and communication lines extend beyond the confines of the conflict. Usually, the style and language of war are borrowed from abroad. The means of communication is particularly important because it is a crucial ingredient of political organisation. It is also crucial for the coordination of followers and for eliciting mass and international support.

From the above, it is obvious that each of the structures ramifies beyond the frontiers of the political system. The first task of the researcher then is to demonstrate empirically the existence of the external

components in these structures. The second stage is the analytical and it is here that the existence of these external components is accounted for.

Within the framework, there are two levels at which the international aspects of a conflict can be analysed. First is the level of foreign policy of the disputants and of foreign states. Both parties to the conflict articulate and pursue foreign policies to influence each other and foreign states to achieve some objectives such as winning allies and counter-acting the alliances of the other side. At this level, there are three mechanisms which account for internationalisation.

The first is the "request for foreign aid". For the weaker party, the only way of redressing the power balance is to invite foreign assistance. The second mechanism follows from the first. If the weaker party solicits foreign assistance, the stronger side automatically seeks support outside if it is to maintain its preponderance. As Modelski puts it:

The natural and obvious expectation that the weaker party will sooner or later summon foreign help forces the stronger side to make anticipatory moves even if no call for such aid has been sent out.⁹²

92. Ibid., p.21. See, also pp. 22-41 for the rest of the framework.

Thirdly, every conflict has a "third party" with its own internal and external structures. The third party exists both within and outside the political system. This phenomenon follows from the mechanisms above because the request for external aid and/or efforts to counteract such moves turn every conflict into an international issue. Externally, some states become interested in settling the conflict peacefully for various reasons and are therefore brought in to mediate and reconcile both sides. This role can be played by two or more external actors including international organisations.

The three mechanisms above offer external actors three choices. The first is to help the weaker party usually the insurgents. This is to engage in "subversion". The second foreign policy reaction is to support the stronger party (usually the incumbents) and this mode of involvement is described as "foreign aid". The third alternative is to seek a peaceful solution through mediation. Even if a country does not get involved directly, then by so doing nothing, it might unwittingly be helping to determine the outcome of the conflict. For instance, by refusing to support either side, it may be helping the stronger side to suppress the weaker.

At the level of the international society, the

behaviour of the system greatly affects the outcome of every war, for as Modelski contends, the result of every internal war is subject to international ratification. Every major change in status of a state or government through a coup, secession, partition or the formation of an insurgent government is subject to the recognition of member of the international system. As such, every new state, government and nationalist movement must seek and receive the recognition of other states. Again, there are three processes through which the international system influences local wars. The first is through "diffusion and encouragement" of an internal conflict. Depending on the "climate of international opinion" at every given time, the international system favours or condemns certain types of national and political behaviour. In some cases, it encourages the insurgents (and isolates the incumbents) by strengthening their morale and facilitating external supplies.

Secondly, at other times, it "isolates or suppresses" the internal conflict and this is invariably to the disadvantage of the insurgents. In this case, it supports the incumbent regime and deprives the insurgents of international acceptance and support.

The third option, "reconciliation", operates where neither of the earlier two is favoured and where the

result of the war is not as important as the violence it generates and the dangers of it spreading. In such a situation, the international system's interest is best satisfied by efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully.

In conclusion, Modelski posits that in order to determine how the international system will treat an internal war, one has to look at the "cultural structures" or "formulae" of the system and at its "structures of authority" or its "ruling class". As he puts it, the international system favours the party to a conflict which accord with its prevailing "formula" and reinforces the "structure of authority". By the "formula" is meant the dominant regime of values and attitudes held by the major actors of the system.

Generally, the above model offers a comprehensive framework within which the international aspects of a conflict can be analysed. In applying it in this study, further clarifications and additions would be necessary.

In actual conflict situation, the "structures of the war" may split into more than two sets as the insurgent movement might be divided with each faction acquiring its own structures. In addition, at the level of foreign policy, the three alternatives or options for external actors as

put forward by Modelski need not be, and are usually not, mutually exclusive. As the dynamics of a war change (in terms of scope and intensity), so do the reactions of foreign states. As such a state which used to support the insurgents might later switch its support to the incumbent. In other words, the longer the duration of a conflict, the more complicated its pattern of international alignments. For, changes in the circumstances and dispositions of the disputants and those of foreign actors through, for instance, (capabilities and regime changes) may affect the pattern of foreign involvement.

Moreover, international influences at the systemic and (subsystemic) levels are not necessarily immutable. For, while a particular war might be isolated or suppressed at a point in time, it may be encouraged at another.

Limitations to The Study

There are a few limitations to this research, stemming, in large part, from the constraints of resources as well as the nature of the subject-matter.

The most important of these shortcomings was the inability to visit Ethiopia (and Eritrea) due to some fairly obvious reasons. First, Ethiopia is at present going through a most unsettling period as the Mengistu regime confronts several crises on many fronts not least

of which is the Eritrean question. The prevailing mood in Addis-Ababa and the war fronts do not appear conducive to this kind of academic enquiry. Secondly, even in the best of times, both the government and the liberation movement are of necessity secretive and sensitive about most of the issues involved. Moreover, because of the intensification of the fighting in Eritrea, and other parts of Ethiopia, access to relevant people and places is most certain to be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible.

Nonetheless, the trips to the United Kingdom and the United States yielded access to crucial archival and official documents from which relevant data were extracted. While in London, I established contacts with officials of the EPLF and of the Ethiopian embassy who assisted in procuring relevant primary materials and obliged me with crucial details and views from which I subsequently sifted necessary information. These contacts were followed and supplemented by correspondences with, and questionnaires mailed to, key officials of the nationalist front and of the Ethiopia government. Effort was also made to solicit information from foreign actors involved in, and close observers of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict through correspondence.

CHAPTER TWOORIGINS AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEMEritrea and Ethiopia

Eritrea's pre-colonial history, particularly the nature of its relationship with successive Ethiopian empire-states, has been a subject of controversy between the two parties to the conflict.¹ Successive Ethiopian regimes have claimed that there is a historically constituted Ethiopian state which has had a continuous existence both territorially and administratively and that Eritrea was an integral part of that state until 1890 when Italian colonialism severed that relationship. Indeed, on several occasions, Addis-Ababa had laid claims to most territories in the Horn of Africa. In April 1891, for instance, Emperor Menelik II sent a circular to European powers stating that his territories extended to Khartoum and Lake Victoria in the West and to the Red Sea in the east and South-east.² These claims were based on racial affinities as well as on the argument that, at some point in history, these

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1. For a synopsis and critical examination of these contrasting claims, see James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984), pp.24-28.
 2. Harold G. Marcus, The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913 (London: OUP, 1975), pp.119-121.

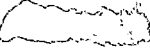
territories were part of the Ethiopian empire.

In regard of Eritrea, the Ethiopian claim was presented to the United Nations Commission in 1950 by Aklilu Habtewold, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, who declared:

In the course of your travels in Eritrea and Ethiopia, you have been able to note for yourself the complete identity of territories and peoples which for thousands of years have been identified under the name of Ethiopia. Notwithstanding fifty years of Italian regime in Eritrea you have seen the same peoples... Gentlemen, for 4000 years Eritrea and Ethiopia have been identical in their historical development.³

In the same vein, and more recently, the post-Selassie regime maintained that:

History attests that the northern part of Ethiopia, especially the region now called Eritrea has been the cradle of Ethiopian civilization... When the Axumite civilization reached its apogee from the fourth to the eighth century A.D., the Eritrean region was an integral part of Ethiopia... It played a leading role in maintaining the cohesion of the country... Hence up and until the second half of the nineteenth century the strong link between the Eritrean region and the central government has never been severed.⁴

 Ethiopia's claims to Eritrea are based on endless genealogies and ancient heritage. Moreover, there are also

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3. Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea: Consultations with the Government of Ethiopia, Annex 6 (New York: United Nations, 1950).
 4. The Ethiopia Revolution and the Problem in Eritrea, Ethiopia Revolution Information Center, Addis Ababa, 1977. See also, Ethiopia: A Cradle of History (Addis Ababa, Ministry of Information, 1989).

economic and strategic considerations. Addis Ababa depends on the ports at Massawa and Assab (both in Eritrea) for its sea outlet. Strategically, Eritrea is vital to Addis Ababa's security in that the former had served as the base for foreign invasions starting from 1868 to the fascist conquest of 1935.⁵

On their part, the Eritreans have argued that even though some parts of Eritrea constituted the core of the ancient Axumite civilisation, the present day Ethiopia in no way corresponds to the Kingdom of Axum which crumbled around the seventh century and never revived. They further contend that it was only with the advent of European colonialism that Eritrea, Ethiopia, and most other Third World countries took on their present political and administrative identities and, moreover, that nowhere in Africa have ancient claims been allowed to override the principle and right of colonised people to build within colonial frontiers new nations of their own. In a commentary in 1977, Vanquard, an organ of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front argued:

It is true that the land of modern day Eritrea was the cradle and centre of the ancient Axumite

5. This was the crux of the Digest of Memoranda presented by the Imperial Ethiopian Government to the Council of Foreign Ministers in London, September 1945. Revised edition, April 1946, pp. 3-11. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa.

Kingdom. But the Axumite Kingdom even at the height of its glory never expanded beyond the present southern frontiers of the contemporary northernmost Ethiopian province of Tigray... For many centuries (after its collapse) the people remained divided into several tribal territories and carried out intermittent aggression against each other... Hence contrary to expansionist Ethiopia's false claims of "3000 years of history originating before the era of the Axumite kingdom", it was (the) unjust U.N. federal resolution that for the first time brought Eritrea under Ethiopian rule. After all, the ancient kingdom was the kingdom of Axum and not the kingdom of Ethiopia.⁶

In order to ascertain the real nature of the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia since pre-colonial times, it is necessary to examine these contrasting claims against available historical accounts.

The Pre-colonial Period

The name Eritrea was derived from the Greek word Erythraea (Red) which was used to describe this area around the Red Sea. Before it was colonised by the Italians in 1889, it had never had any form of unity, a common government or even a common name. Prior to this time, it was a medley of independent feudal principalities and fiefdoms encompassing various nationalities but

6. Vanguard, April, 1977. Reprinted in Selected Articles from EPLF Publications (1973-1980) published by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, May, 1982, pp.2-14.

lacking a central political authority.⁷ There exists a general consensus that the earliest inhabitants were a Nilotic people, negroid forest dwellers, who moved from south-eastern Sudan into the Eritrean lowlands. They were soon invaded by pastoral Hamitic people from the deserts of the Northern Sudan. These earlier settlers were soon followed by Semites (Sabaen) who, driven by warfare, crossed the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula and settled on the plateau which has the same climate with the South Arabian highlands from which they came. Historically, therefore, this area has been inhabited by a curious mosaic of peoples of various origins and links with other peoples across the border.⁸

Apart from its heterogeneous population, Eritrea also exhibits a remarkable variety in topography with diverse types of terrain. This topography is a mixture

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7. See Basil Davidson "An Historical Note" in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds) Behind the War in Eritrea, For more on Eritrea's history from pre-colonial times, see, also, Stephen A. Longrigg, A Short History of Eritrea (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1945); and G.K.N. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); and Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed), The Long Struggle of Eritrea (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989).
8. On these earliest movements and settlements, across the region of the Horn of Africa, see, I.M. Lewis, Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa (London: Ithaca Press, 1983) and also, Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali Afar and Saho (London: International African Institute, 1955).

of the mountainous central and northern highlands, with an escarpment descending to the western plains of Barka with its rich soils, and the arid eastern Afar region which provides for little livelihood or commerce. Indeed, these contrasting topographical and climatic conditions have produced different patterns of economic and social life. In the highlands are the Tigrinya speaking people who share significant cultural traits with the Tigrinya speakers of Ethiopia. Mostly Christians, these are settled agriculturalists who live in village communities. To the North and West of the central highlands and along much of the coastal plains are Tigre speakers who are mostly Moslem pastoral nomads and semi-nomads. The southern portion of the coastal plains is sparsely inhabited by the highly mobile Danakil, a predominantly Moslem people. Between the Danakil and the highland live the Saho, also, predominantly Moslems and pastoral nomads and in the Gash~~Setit~~ lowlands are the Baria and Kunama who are descendants of the original Nilotic settlers.⁹

9. See S.F. Nadel, *Races and Tribes of Eritrea* (Asmara: British Military Administration, 1943); British Military Administration, Handbook for Eritrea (Asmara: British Military Administration, 1944); Richard Sherman, Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1980); E. Sylvia Pankhurst, Eritrea on the Eve (Essex: New Time and Ethiopia New Books, 1952); and, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Eritrea Pre-capitalist Social Formations", Horn of Africa, Vol.3, No.4, 1980/81, pp.22-36.

The peoples of Eritrea have had a long history of immigrations, invasions and partition between alien rulers. These earlier historical processes produced cultural and ethnic mixtures and contributed to the formation of nationalities with varied socio-economic and cultural attributes. The Axumite era is generally accepted as the beginning of the historical contact between the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Axum was established in the northern part of Tigre and Southern Eritrea. Certainly, the greater part of Eritrea formed the central region of the kingdom. At its zenith in the fourth century A.D., the kingdom of Axum extended as far north as Nubia in present day Sudan and across the Red Sea into Yema. In their imperial drives, Axumite rulers were able to subjugate and incorporate various peoples into the empire. Axum's power was based on control of the Red Sea and it prospered and thrived on maritime trade with the outside world through the ancient port of Adulis.

However, the rise of Islam and the occupation of the Red Sea coast by Arab forces in 640 A.D. led to a down-turn in external trade thus setting the stage for decline of Axum. The process of disintegration was further fuelled by other factors such as the invasion and

conquest of its territories by the Bejas. Eventually, the empire collapsed towards the end of the ninth century A.D.¹⁰ The fall of Axum and its aftermath had been described by Gibbon as follows:

Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Aethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten.¹¹

In the period following the demise of Axum, (referred to as the "centuries of historical nights"), several states rose and fell around the area of the defunct kingdom. Most parts of Eritrea however came under the rule of the Bejas who had control of the northern highland, western lowlands and the plateau until the end of the thirteenth century.¹² It was around this time that the semitic speaking Amharas established their kingdom, the Amhara or Abyssinian kingdom, and the Solomonic dynasty which claimed descent not only from Axumite rulers, but beyond them, from Biblical Solomon and the legendary Queen of Sheba. Even then, most of Eritrea was under independent kingdoms.¹³ In the fourteenth century, however, the Amhara kingdom began to expand and this necessarily led to the invasion of Eritrea and

10. See Ernest W. Luther, Ethiopia Today (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 9-22.

11. Quoted in Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.57.

12. Ibid. See, also, Richard Greefield, "Pre-Colonial and Colonial History" in Basil Davidson et.al, Behind the War in Eritrea op.cit., pp.17-31.

13. Ibid., pp.59-60

by the fifteenth century, the Eritrean plateau, consisting the areas of Hamasin, Serai and parts of Akalai Guzai, had been brought into a tributary relationship with the Ethiopian kingdom. Although other parts of Eritrea in the lowlands were frequently raided by the Amharas, they were never effectively incorporated into the kingdom. According to Trevaskis:

The Abyssinians raided into the lowlands but never remained to garrison them; they plundered but never governed...the northern highlands attracted small expeditions of Abyssinian colonialists, they tended to become assimilated to the nomadic folk among whom they lived.¹⁴

From the early sixteenth century, the Amhara kingdom began to face diverse external threats. With the rise of the Islamic states came invasions by Muslim armies such as those of the Imam of Harrar and, more reputedly, Ahmad Gran of Adal. Another crucial factor was the advent of the Ottoman Turks who occupied the Red Sea Coast in 1557. This Ottoman expansion as well as the Galla invasions further undermined the authority of the Amhara rulers who consequently had to retreat having lost the ability to extract tribute from erstwhile subject territories. The contraction of the kingdom was vividly described by Ullendorff thus:

14. G.K.N. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition op.cit., p.6.

...Fasiladas (1632-67)... chose Gondar as his capital. This choice had almost symbolical significance for it reflected the inchoate withdrawal of the monarchy from the centre of the Ethiopian scene. The foundation of Gondar as the capital heralded the steady growth of regionalism, the increasing independence of the great feudal lords and the progressive reduction of the negusa negast, shorn of all real power, to serve merely as the symbol of the Solomonic connection.¹⁵

The period of the seventeenth century marked the steady decline of central power while the "era of princes" (1769-1855) saw the complete disintegration of the empire.¹⁶ Richard Greenfield¹⁶ has traced the pre-colonial relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia and underscored the tenuousness of the latter's central power. According to him:

The Eritrean people lived on the periphery of Abyssinia only occasionally affected by the authority of that empire-state. The medieval history of the latter can be represented as a series of cyclic expansions and withdrawals from one or other of a series of foci in northeastern Africa. As Ethiopian history has normally been portrayed, withdrawals to the 'highland core of ancient Abyssinia' have been seen as general reverses for 'Ethiopian nationalism' - this is superficial. The corollary has been ignored that other nationalism, which it has not been fashionable to study, may be shown to have thrived at such times.¹⁷

15. Ullendorff, The Ethiopians, p.79.

16. See Mordechai Abir, Ethiopia: The Era of Princes (London: Longmans, 1968) especially pp. 73-118.

17. Greenfield, "Pre-Colonial and Colonial History" p.53 in Davidson et.al., op.cit., pp.16-17.

Thus, while the Ethiopian empire contracted and disintegrated, the Ottoman empire consolidated its suzerainty over the coastal areas of Massawa and Hargigo. Again, the relationship between these coastal principalities and the Ottomans was essentially tributary, as actual power remained in the hands of local rulers who continued to exercise effective control over their territories.¹⁸

After over three hundred years of Turkish suzerainty over this coastal region, they were displaced by the Egyptians first from Massawa in 1872 and, with British help, won all Turkish possessions in the area through a treaty in 1875. British interest in this region developed with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which greatly enhanced the strategic significance of the coastlines of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. At the same time, other imperialist powers, notably Italy, France and Ethiopia also had interest in this region. British support for Egypt, therefore, was a ploy to keep the French out of this coveted strategic terrain. The Egyptians, however, still had to contend with Italy's

18. See J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); G.K.N. Tresvaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition; and, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989).

presence in the port of Assab which had become an Italian possession in 1869. Eventually, Italy displaced Egypt from Massawa in 1885 and, with British encouragement, moved to enlarge its presence around the Red Sea.¹⁹ Again, the tacit support which Britain lent Italy stemmed from its (British) general anxieties over French threats (from its toe-hold in Djibouti) to British interests along the Nile. Italy, therefore, was envisioned as a useful countervailing force to the perceived threats.

In the period leading up to and during this colonial 'scramble', the Amhara kingdom of Shoa was on the ascendancy and was well on the way to building a full-fledged empire-state. Thus, as the foreign powers pillaged various peoples in search of colonial possessions, Emperor Menelik II, whom the Italians had earlier helped to the throne and furnished with arms, embarked on an unprecedented expansionist drive subjugating other peoples in Oromo, Guraje and Wollamo to the South and West, and the Somalis to the east. In the process of consolidating the empire-state, Menelik II exploited the rivalries among the foreign powers and extracted assistance

19. B.H. Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, op.cit., pp.50-51.

from them.²⁰ And, in return for Italian assistance, the Ethiopian monarch readily recognised the former's suzerainty over the territories which Rome had occupied by signing the treaty of Ucciali in 1889. The treaty not only recognised Italy's full rights over its colonial possession, it went further to establish the boundary between Eritrea and the Shoan kingdom at the Mareb river.²¹

From the above account of Eritrea's pre-colonial links with Ethiopia and its emergence as an Italian colony, certain conclusions may be drawn. First, Eritrea was only part of the Axum and that kingdom had little territorial connection with successive Ethiopian states. As Longrigg, a former British Chief Administrator of Eritrea, contended:

... the Axum kingdom corresponded very little with the modern state of Ethiopia. It did not in its golden age extend southwards

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20. See Harold G. Marcus, The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) pp.177-185; Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopia Independence (London: Heineman, 1976), especially pp.384-410. See, also, G.N. Sanderson, "The Foreign Policy of the Negus Menelik, 1896-1898", Journal of African History, 4 (1964) pp. 87-97. Sanderson (at p.93) had described Menelik as "a subtle and far sighted diplomatist with, at times, an almost Bismarckian capacity for keeping several irons in the fire".
21. See "Eritrea's Borders: Selected Treaties (1898 to 1908)" Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol.III, No.1, Summer 1988, pp.65-72.

beyond the limits of the present Tigre.²²

Certainly, Ethiopian empires have varied in territory and authority over time as a result of wars, migrations and conquest. Secondly, only some parts of Eritrea, especially the highlands, were really subject to payment of tributes and even then, the extraction of such payment was sporadic and for limited periods. In any case, payment of tribute was not evidence of nationality, being only a form of insurance frequently paid to more than one raiding force. As for the other areas, the western part, the Barka lowland, and the Gash-Setit delta, it was a fusion of local independence and some form of tributary relationship with neighbouring and more powerful non-Ethiopian states. For instance, the Bani Amer, the dominant ethnic group in the west, were, from the sixteenth century onward, in a tributary relationship with the Funj Kingdom of Sinnar, a part of present day Sudan. As such, up till the time of Italian colonization, there was no time the whole of Eritrea constituted part of a unified state with clearly demarcated frontiers. Again, according to Longrigg:

Against the sometimes advocated assignment of the whole (of Eritrea) to Ethiopia (which would accept it and indeed actively claims it), is the certainty that much of Eritrea was never Ethiopian; and that such parts could not

22. S.H. Longrigg, A Short History of Eritrea, p.13.

be suitably or acceptably ruled by that government.²³

From Italian Colonisation to British Administration

For a number of reasons, Italian colonialism got off to a slow start. First was its own economic backwardness as well as internal opposition to such venture.²⁴ Besides, the colonial enterprise was then dominated by Britain and France. Ironically, the spread of Italian influence in the Horn of Africa, particularly around the Red Sea, was facilitated by the Anglo-French rivalry and covert support of the British who, as earlier stated, found it convenient to have a 'junior partner' around the coastlines of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Italy's move into Eritrea dates from the purchase by a Genoese ship owner, in 1869, of a strip of seaboard in the Bay of Assab. In 1882, the government of Fransisco Crispi, in its cautious bid for this coastal territory, took over the entire part of Assab from the Rubattino Shipping Company and declared the area a protectorate. After Assab, the Italians took over Massawa in 1885 and subsequently moved into the interior, seizing important places like Asmara and Keren in 1888. This process of colonisation was however resisted by

23. Ibid., p. 171.

24. Davidson, "An Historical Note" op.cit., p.11.

Eritreans who encountered the Italians in several battles. However, by 1889, the whole of Eritrea including the plateau which was taken from the Abyssinians had been pacified.²⁵

Eritrea, like the vast majority of African states was carved out as an artificial entity made up of a hodgepodge of various peoples. According to Trevaskis, Italy created through an "act of surgery" by:

... severing its different peoples from those with whom their past had been linked and by grafting the amputated remnants to each other under the title of Eritrea.²⁶

Thus, Italian colonialism brought together different social and ethnic groups inhabiting contiguous territories under a political administrative and territorial unit.

Eritrea was Italy's first colony and, therefore, was crucial to the latter's further imperialist designs. Indeed, it was envisioned as a "special colony" - a "jumping-off spot" to create an Italian East African empire. Because of this imperative, and despite its oppressive and exploitative nature, Italian colonialism led to the development of Eritrea's productive forces. Being the take-off point, the colonial state invested in

25. Ibid.

26. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, op.cit.

the development of infrastructure, especially for communications and transportation, by building a vast network of roads, railways, ports and airports.²⁷ From a strict cost-benefit analysis, Italian investment in infrastructural development in Eritrea was superfluous, if not outright wasteful. However, as James Petras pointed out, the Italian imperial state was able to rationalise this in terms of the "larger empire and profits" envisaged as payoffs from further colonial expansion.²⁸ As such, the development of infrastructure in Eritrea was not only to facilitate the exploitation and export of its raw materials such as cotton, fruits, sisal and coffee for use by metropolitan industries, it was also to facilitate Italian military mobility in further colonial drive.

Another factor that contributed to infrastructural development was the emergence of an Italian settler-population which was instrumental to the drawing of resources from the metropole to the colony. From the outset, Italy had planned to transform Eritrea into a settler-colony similar to such colonial territories

27. See Araya Tseggai, "Independent Eritrea: Economically Viable?", Horn of Africa, Vol., No.2, 1983 pp.39-49 especially at p.47.

28. James Petras, The Eritrean Revolution and Contemporary World Politics, (Trenton, N.J.: Africa Research and Publications Project, Inc., 1984), p.2.

as Kenya and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) under Britain. Towards this end, the colonial state appropriated the most fertile lands for farms and plantations. In 1891, a Commission of Inquiry was sent to Eritrea and it recommended that the plateau should serve as the region for the settlement of Italian immigrants.²⁹ Consequently, the colonialists began to tinker with the traditional land tenure system and between 1893 and 1895, a series of ordinances was rolled out to back the appropriation of about 300,000 hectares of land designated as crown lands reserved for Italian colonisers. The plan for a settler colony, however, met with stiff resistance by the native population who were being increasingly alienated from their lands. In spite of their protests, the imperatives of colonial capitalist development - creation of large cities, construction of ports, roads, railways, telegraph lines, and air-ports - all of these required land which was forcibly acquired from its owners. Thus, as the colonial state appropriated large tracts of land, peasants were compelled to take up wage employment in the colonial sector. These colonial practices profoundly affected existing modes and relations of production and the social and political structures,

29. Richard Pankhurst, "Italian Settlement Policy in Eritrea and its Repercussions 1889-1896" in Jeffrey Butler (ed.) Boston University Papers in African History, Vol. 1 (Boston: Boston University Press, 1964).

which were modified and adapted to meet the imperatives of colonial development.³⁰

In 1935, fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia from its colonial bases in Eritrea and Somaliland and in 1936 its dream of an Italian East Africa comprising Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia was actualised.³¹ For Eritrea, the economic fall-out from this development was monumental. After 1935, the colony was transformed from a military staging area to an economic "take-off" area. This process was fully captured by Trevaskis:

With the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, Eritrea was converted into a base for the exploitation of the Ethiopian hinterland. During the following five years, military installations, public buildings, workshops, depots, warehouses, offices, shops, blocks of flats, villas and encampments were rapidly thrown up. The port of Massawa was enlarged and linked with Asmara by one of the longest cable-ways in the world. A magnificent network of roads was constructed to supplement the little mountain railway and the few rough tracks which formerly linked Asmara with the territory's main centres. Modern airports were built at Asmara and Gura, and a number of satellite landing-grounds were laid out elsewhere. All this was carried out by an army of Italian officials, engineers, mechanics, artisans, professional men and traders who arrived in the territory after 1935, and it was made possible by large-scale imports of mechanical and constructional material

30. See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "European Colonial Rule and the Transformation of Eritrean Rural Life", Horn of Africa 6(2) 1983 pp. 50-60.

31. See A. del Boca, The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

and a lavish investment of Italian capital.³²

Clearly, the expansion of Italian colonial estate culminated in the rapid growth of Eritrea. A few illustrations are apposite here. First, there was the massive influx of Italians into Eritrea. Before 1935, the Italian settler population never exceeded 5,000 but by 1941, the number had shot up to 10,000. Another indicator of the growth was the rise of urban cities in such places as Asmara, Agordat and Massawa. By 1940, Asmara alone had a population of around 100,000 and about 20 per cent of the entire Eritrean population was living in cities.³³ On the economic front, there was also a remarkable expansion in light industry, commerce, and capitalist agriculture with the establishment of several agro-based industries dealing in hides, meat and fibres. As against the 56 businesses operating in Eritrea in 1930, there were over 2,000 in 1939 with a capital base of over 2 billion lire. Moreover, this economic expansion called for additional development in infrastructures which attracted more investment from the metropolitan regime of Mussolini. For example, port facilities were extended so that the daily capacity of Massawa rose to 1,500 tons. In addition,

32. Travaskis, *op.cit.*, p.36, and, G.W. Baer, The Coming of Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

33. Ibid. p.33. Also, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "European Colonial Rule and the Transformation of Eritrean Rule Life", p.52.

hundreds of kilometres of asphalt roads were constructed and the existing postal and telecommunications services were improved. The hydro-electric installation in Eritrea, the first in East Africa, was upgraded to reach a capacity of 15 million kilowatt-hours in 1939.³⁴

A major consequence of this phenomenal growth was a greater demand for labour and land and in order to meet these needs, the Italians had to tamper with the indigenous social and political organisation, particularly the material base of rural life in the colony. This heightened need for land and labour for state and capitalist ventures further deepened the alienation of peasants and created a scarcity of cultivable land thus forcing many peasants to seek wage employment. In effect, the material basis of feudal expropriation of peasants' surpluses was eroded as these serfs became economically free subjects. Indeed, attempts by the colonial state to centralise the superstructure of feudal chieftaincy generated intense contradictions which manifested in peasants' revolts, and insubordination and struggle to end serf-obligation to the chiefs. In most of the lowlands, there emerged peasants alliance based on

34. See Araia Tsiggai, "Historical Analysis of Infrastructural Development in Italian Eritrea: 1835-1941" (Part Two), *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, Vol.1, No.2, Winter, 1987, pp.10-25.

solidarity cutting across linguistic and cultural barriers.³⁵

Apart from its impact on the peasantry, Italian colonialism also created new social classes with significant social and political implications for the Eritrean society. Due to the exigencies of colonial rule and development, hordes of workers, merchants, artisans and government functionaries were attracted to the cities and these groups were to constitute the embryos of the proletariat and petit-bourgeois classes. Although initially small, multinational and severely marginalised, they gradually became cohesive and politically conscious.

Thus, after fifty years of Italian rule, colonial capitalism had created a socio-economic and material base which served to draw the different peoples and nationalities of Eritrea into a network of economic activity. A necessary product of this emergent material base was the formation of a common consciousness which tended to attenuate the hostility between and promote the understanding among the different communities. True, this welding together of heterogeneous groups into a single political and economic unit was fraught with contradictions arising from traditional and other

35. See Trevaskis, p.73; and, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, p.53.

divisive factors. However, as colonial rule was imposed on these groups of disparate agricultural and pastoral peoples, it ultimately led to an immutable process of integration.

In the wake of the second world war, Italy was dislodged from Eritrea by the Allied forces in the spring of 1941. Consequently, from 1941-1952, Eritrea was under the provisional British administration which took advantage of its existing infrastructure to turn it into a major supply depot during the war years. This war-time exigency further contributed to the development of Eritrean industry, infrastructure and commerce. For instance, an airplane assembly plant was built at Gura while a naval base was created at Massawa. Besides these military-related projects, non-military industrial activities were also stimulated, culminating in a war-time boom in commodity production.³⁶

A corollary to this economic boom was the relatively liberal political climate which emerged in the colony. Under the British administration, a lot of administrative reforms were introduced including the indigenisation of subordinate administrative positions in the colonial service. Furthermore, educational and literacy

36. Ibid., See, also, James Petras, The Eritrean Revolution and Contemporary World Politics. op.cit.

efforts were revitalised as books in Arabic, Tigrinya and English were published in large quantities. The result of all these reforms was the growth in political consciousness and activity among Eritrean workers, the burgeoning petit-bourgeoisie and, to some degree, the peasantry. By the 1940s, this development had culminated in the formation of political associations and parties.³⁷

On the whole, as a result of the combined impact of Italian and British colonial rule, Eritrea became relatively economically and politically more advanced than its neighbours particularly Ethiopia. For while Eritrea had a fairly developed form of capitalist production and a liberal political dispensation, Ethiopia remained as a feudal society under a bureaucratic and aristocratic regime and this accounts for the concrete unevenness in socio-economic and political structures in both countries.

Foreign Powers, the United Nations and Eritrea

After the second World War, the issue of the future of former Italian colonies was a subject of conversations and negotiations among the four victorious powers - the United States, USSR, U.K., and France - at the London conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers

37. See Bereket Habte Selassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation" in, Davidson et.al. Behind the War in Eritrea; pp.32-47.

in September 1945. Meanwhile, Ethiopia had also renewed its claims to Eritrea. In a memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Churchill at the Cairo conference of February 1945, Addis Ababa urged that with the forfeiture of Italian rule, Eritrea should revert to its former and rightful owner.³⁸ Of course, Churchill could not grant Selassie's request and informed the Emperor that the disposal of Eritrea and other former Italian colonies was not up to Britain alone, and that all such post-war matters would be tabled at an upcoming peace conference in Paris.

The Paris Peace Conference took place between July 29 and October 15, 1946 and was attended by the four Allied Powers and sixteen other invited countries including Italy and Ethiopia. At this conference, Italy formally renounced claims to all her former colonies - Libya, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland - and the Paris Peace Treaty provided that the disposal of these territories would be determined by the Allied Powers. It further stipulated that if the four powers failed to come to agreement on the disposal of these former Italian colonies within a year of the coming into force of the

38. See Tekie Fessehazion, "International Dimensions of the Eritrean Question", Horn of Africa 6(2) 1983, pp.7-24 at p.9.

Treaty, the matter should be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations.³⁹

In November 1947, the Allied Powers decided to send a Commission of Investigation to the three territories to ascertain the needs and wishes of the peoples and to make appropriate recommendations for the disposal of the colonies. The Four-Power Commission was in Eritrea from November 12, 1947 to January 3, 1948. According to its terms of reference, it was to gather necessary information on the economic, political and social climate in the country to assist the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers to determine the future of the colony. Although it finally submitted a report in May 1948, the Four Powers could not come to agreement on what to do with Eritrea.

All along, the members of the Commission had disagreed among themselves and the final report submitted to the Council of Foreign Ministers reflected this division within the body.⁴⁰ Initially, the U.K. delegates expressed their government's desire that the whole of Eritrea be placed under Ethiopian trusteeship for ten years at the end of which Eritreans would decide

39. Ibid.

40. Government of the United States of America, Department of State, Paris Peace Conference, 1946 (selected documents) Publication 2868 Conference Series 103 (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947).

their own future. The United States and French delegates canvassed for the partition of Eritrea with the sea port of Assab going to Ethiopia. In its own plan, the U.S. proposed that the fate of the remaining parts of Eritrea would be postponed for one year. On its part, France suggested that the other parts of the colony be administered by Italy. Finally, the Soviets proposed that Eritrea be placed under Italian trusteeship for a specified period of time.⁴¹

Amidst these conflicting proposals, it became impossible to decide on the disposal of this territory and on September 15, 1948, the Four Powers advised the Secretary-General of the United Nations that in line with the terms of the Paris Peace Treaty, the disposal of Italy's former colonies, including Eritrea, was being referred to the General Assembly of the UN for consideration.

The issue of Eritrea was formally brought before the United Nations on September 21, 1948, and it was immediately referred to its first committee for consideration. The committee submitted its report to the third session of the General Assembly in April 1949. In regard of Eritrea, it recommended that it should be partitioned between

41. Four Power Commission of Investigation for the Former Italian Colonies, Vol.1, Report on Eritrea, 1948.

Ethiopia and Sudan.⁴² This proposal also coincided with the Bevin-Sforza plan which had been worked out between the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Storza. According to this plan, Libya was to be divided into three parts each of which would be under different trusteeships - one under the British, another under the French and the third under Italy; Italian Somaliland would be administered under Italian trusteeship and Eritrea to be partitioned along this line: the Christian highlands and the Red Sea coast would go to Ethiopia while the western plains were to be united with the Sudan (then under British control).⁴³

Far back in 1943, a British colonial official, Douglas Newbold, then Civil Secretary of Sudan, had advocated the partition of Eritrea arguing that:

... it would be happier for them (the moslem tribes of Eritrea) and no trouble for us (the colonial government in Sudan) to take these two or three districts into Sudan and let the christian and Tigrinya speaking districts be reunited to the kinsfold in Ethiopia.⁴⁴

42. Year Book of the United Nations, 1950 (New York: Columbia University Press in Cooperation with the United Nations, 1951), pp. 363-370.

43. See Keesings Contemporary Archives, January 1-7, 1950, p. 10432, and Trevaskis, Eritrea, p.93.

44. Quoted in K.D.D. Hendeson, The Making of Sudan (London: Faber, 1953), p.335.

All along, the British had steadily nurtured this design for Eritrea based on its perceived strategic importance. In its memorandum, the colonial office had stressed the imperative of ensuring that the territory did not fall into enemy hands. As it argued:

In hostile hands it may block our sea communications through the Red Sea to various parts of the British Empire, and if used as a stepping stone to the Abyssinian mountains bastion, may constitute a threat to the whole of Eastern Africa.⁴⁵

Besides this strategic imperative, ceding parts of Eritrea to Ethiopia was seen as a necessary quid pro quo for Emperor Haile Selassie to renounce its claims to the Ogaden region which was then envisioned as part of the imperial (British) Greater Somalia. In a May 1944 memorandum, the Foreign Office canvassed thus:

If it were decided to ask the Emperor to relinquish the whole Province of Ogaden with parts of Harar and Bale, a strip of territory along the Kenya frontier near Mayale, and the Barro triangle in the west, it might be thought necessary to offer him full sovereignty of all those parts of Eritrea to which he will attach particular importance - The Tigrinya speaking area, the Danakil country and Massawa. If strategic considerations were to preclude the offer of Massawa, it might be necessary to lighten the other side of the scale

45. Colonial office, "The Future of Italian Colonies", A Memorandum to the Foreign Office: Most Secret FO.371/35414, April 21, 1943; File No.52, (Public Records Office, London).

accordingly.⁴⁶

An indication that the United Kingdom was firmly disposed towards partitioning the territory was given in 1950 by the administrator in Eritrea, Greville Drew, who stated, in response to attacks on opponents of union with Ethiopia, that, "H.M. Government had not changed their view that the territory's eastern provinces be ceded to Ethiopia".⁴⁷ As usual, the British were not short of rationalisation for their plan as against granting independence to Eritrea. According to Longrigg, then Chief Administrator of the colony, "an independent Eritrea could not but end in anarchy or in renewed European control", for, as he argued, offering the familiar colonialist alibi, "there exists no imaginable governing or administrative class in the colony."⁴⁸

At any rate, the partition plan was rejected by the General Assembly as several delegates charged that it was a product of private negotiations between the United Kingdom and Italy in disregard of international opinion and the wish of the Eritrean people who, according to the report of the Four-Power Commission, were united in their emphatic opposition to the plan to divide their

46. Foreign Office Research Department, Most Secret FO.371/40601, March, 1943; File No. 682, (Public Records Office, London).

47. Keesings, January 1-7, 1950, p.10432

48. S.H. Longrigg, op.cit., p.171.

country.⁴⁹ As the plan fell through, the General Assembly recommended that the matter be reopened at its next session.

At the fourth regular session of the General Assembly which opened on September 20, 1949, the issue of the future of former Italian colonies was reconsidered. While the cases of Libya and Italian Somaliland were disposed of - Libya to be granted independence in 1952; Somaliland to be under a ten-year Italian trusteeship after which it would accede to independence - the fate of Eritrea could not be so resolved. Again three options were proposed and debated: independence; partial incorporation into Ethiopia; and international trusteeship; and each of the major actors remained as resolute in support of its favoured solution thus leaving the Assembly in an impasse. Consequently, it decided to send another commission of inquiry to Eritrea to gather more information. On November 21, 1949, therefore, it passed the resolution, officially known as 289 A(IV), which established the United Nations Commission for Eritrea with the responsibility:

"to ascertain more fully the wishes of the inhabitants of Eritrea and the means of promoting their future welfare, to examine the question of the disposal of Eritrea and to prepare a report for the General Assembly

49. See Report of the Four Power Commission for the former Italian Colonies; also, Keessings Contemporary Archives, November 6-13, 1948, p.9611.

together with such proposal or proposals it may deem appropriate for the solution of the problem".⁵⁰

The UN Commission composed of five members - Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa - visited Eritrea for seven weeks from February 14 to April 6, 1950 and like the earlier Four-Power Commission, it was divided in its report. The majority report (of Burma, Norway and South Africa) recommended union with Ethiopia, arguing that "the poverty of the country (Eritrea) and its dependence on Ethiopia's resources and transit trade precluded its complete independence".⁵¹ In their own report, Pakistan and Guatemala recommended that Eritrea be placed under United Nations trusteeship for a maximum of ten years at the end of which it would become independent. In their own assessment, "while the population of the Eritrean plateau had a certain affinity with the Ethiopian province of Tigre, no general or important affinity existed between Ethiopia and Eritrea". Moreover, they observed that a great number of Eritreans bore "resentment and even hostility towards the neighbouring country".⁵²

The debate on the UN Commission's report opened in an international climate dominated by the Korean war and an expanding American global role. As such, Eritrea's

50. Yearbook of the United Nations, 1950, p.363.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

future had become even more subject to the exigencies of geopolitical consideration and an increasingly fervent East-West rivalry. In the end, there were two major proposals for the solution of the problem. First was the Joint Fourteen-Power resolution (inspired by the US and United Kingdom) which recommended that Eritrea be federated with Ethiopia as "an autonomous unit under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown". The other, sponsored by the Soviet Bloc and Arab countries recommended that Eritrea "should be granted independence immediately".⁵³

After intense debates, the United Nations, on December 2, 1950, by its Resolution 390 A(V), decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia. The preamble to the Resolution states as follows:

Taking into consideration (a) the wishes and welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, including the views of the various racial, religious and political groups of the provinces of the territory and the capacity of the people for self-government; (b) the interests of peace and security in East Africa; (c) the rights and claims of Ethiopia based on geographical, historical, ethnic or economic reasons, including in particular Ethiopia's legitimate need for adequate access to the sea; taking into account the importance of assuring the continuing collaboration of the foreign communities in the economic development of Eritrea, recognizing that the disposal of Eritrea should be based on its close political and economic association with Ethiopia, and desiring that this asso-

53. Ibid.

ciation assures the inhabitants of Eritrea the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, traditions, religions and languages, as well as the widest possible measure of self-government, while at the same time respecting the constitution, institutions, traditions and the international status and identity of the Empire of Ethiopia: (A)(i), Recommends that: Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown".⁵⁴

According to this resolution, the Eritrean government would have legislative, executive and judicial powers over domestic affairs while the federal government would manage defense, foreign affairs, currency and finance, foreign and inter-state commerce, external and inter-state communications including ports. Residual powers were however vested in the Eritrean government while a single nationality was to prevail throughout the federation.

Among other provisions, the resolution stipulated a transition period not extending beyond 1952 during which the Eritrean government would be organized and its constitution prepared and put into effect. As well, a Bolivian diplomat, Eduardo Anze Matienzo was appointed by the General Assembly as the Special United Nations Commissioner to Eritrea and was charged to draft and submit a draft constitution to an Eritrean Assembly to be convoked by the British administering authority.⁵⁵

54. Ibid. For full text of the Resolution 390 A(V), see Appendix I.

55. Ibid.

In compliance with Article 12 of the 1950 UN resolution, the Commissioner held a series of consultations with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister between May and July 1951. Meanwhile he had appointed a four-member panel of jurists to draft a constitution for Eritrea. This panel completed its task and the draft was again discussed and negotiated with the Ethiopian government.⁵⁶ When the Eritrean Assembly met for the first time on September 15, 1952, it ratified the constitution and the federation came into being.

In his final report, the United Nations Commissioner to Eritrea stated categorically that the General Assembly would have to be appraised of any modification to or violation of the federal arrangement. In his concluding remarks, he declared:

With regard to the application of the General Assembly's resolution after the entry into force of the Federal Act and the Constitution of Eritrea... It is true that once the Federal Act and the Eritrean Constitution have come into force the mission entrusted to the General Assembly under the Paris Peace Treaty with Italy will have been fulfilled and the future of Eritrea must be regarded as settled, but it does not follow that the United Nations would no longer have any right to deal with the question of Eritrea. The Federal Act and the Eritrean Constitution will still be based on the resolution of the UN and that international instrument will retain its full force. That

56. See "Report on the Drafting of the Eritrean Constitution" in the Horn of Africa 6(2) 1983, pp. 31-37.

being so, if it were necessary either to amend or to interpret the Federal Act, only the General Assembly, as author of that instrument, would be competent to take a decision. Similarly, if the Federal Act were violated, the General Assembly could be seized on the matter.⁵⁷

From Federation to Annexation: 1952-1962.

Despite the injunction of the UN Commissioner as well as the copious stipulations of Resolution 390A(V) of 1950, the federal arrangement between Eritrea and Ethiopia was doomed from the onset. One major contradiction inherent in it was the absence of the crucial elements of federalism in the association. To begin with, Eritrea was not only unequal to Ethiopia, there also existed wide divergence in their socio-economic and political structures. Besides, although the UN resolution mandated a democratic form of government for Eritrea, it did not make it clear how the imperial government in Addis Ababa was to concede to the democratic ideal and civil liberties in Eritrea without institutionalising similar practice and freedoms in Ethiopia itself. The federal arrangement then, as an American diplomat retrospectively remarked:

was one^{of} the strangest marriages of convenience ever spawned by international politics: a territory with a democratically elected parliament and executive federated with an

57. Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Eritrea, Chapter II, p.201.

absolute monarchy responsible for defense, foreign affairs and money that regarded federation as an anomaly to be corrected at the earliest opportunity.⁵⁸

Putting it in rather blunt terms, a former Ethiopian official admitted that:

It was an impossible agreement. How could Ethiopia, a severely underdeveloped country with no exposure to democracy; a country that had known only absolute monarchy; a country whose history was filled with attempts to establish a central authoritarianism - how could such a country be expected to implement a sophisticated, liberal, federal agreement? The UN proposal, engineered by the Western powers, was not only alien to Ethiopia, but beyond its capacity.⁵⁹

However, in line with the UN resolution, the Eritrean government was based on the "principles of democratic government" and its constitution guaranteed fundamental human rights and freedoms for all citizens. Such freedoms and rights were to be ensured politically and institutionally by means of periodic, free and fair elections, directly and indirectly and by the provision that "the organs of government shall act in the interest of the people". Moreover, the Constitution provided for the

58. David A. Korn, Ethiopia, The United States and the Soviet Union (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 1-2.

59. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989), p.79.

rule of law as follows:

The organs of government and public officials shall have no further powers than those conferred on them by the constitution and by the laws and regulations which give effect thereto.⁶⁰

In contrast to this liberal-democratic Eritrean constitution, Ethiopia remained a classic feudal and absolutist state. Despite the attempts at modernisation culminating in the emergence of a modern army and a bureaucratic machinery, authority and privileges were still concentrated in the monarchy as the strong bond linking the emergent military-bureaucratic elites to the crown reduced them to the "role of royal retainers".⁶¹ The efforts at modernising the cash-crop economy, education and administrative structures were centered around the capital, Addis Ababa with the Amharas appropriating a great deal of the benefits. All this only served to strengthen the centralised Ethiopian state rather than allow for mass participation in political and economic processes.⁶²

Given the resilience of feudalism in Ethiopia, then, the federal union with Eritrea was, therefore, simply the grafting of democratic institutions unto a feudal system

60. Eritrean Constitution, (1952), Art 19.

61. John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (London: Spokesman, 1978), p.34.

62. Ibid.

and, according to Selassie, it was like "an antibody imposed on a body politic that was not able and willing to receive it".⁶³

Also, as earlier noted, Italian colonialism led to the development of a relatively more advanced form of material production in Eritrea while the British interregnum brought political liberalism. The imposition, therefore, of a feudal-bureaucratic state upon an Eritrea that had known economic and political liberalism was bound to lead to conflict. Indeed, the inherent contradictions in the federation were then further compounded by this substantive unevenness between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Moreover, the Addis Ababa regime was, from the outset, clearly uncomfortable with the federal arrangement for some discernible reasons. First, given its multi-national composition, the Emperor might have feared that Eritrea's special status could encourage its already restive nationalities to agitate for concessions of their own. Second, around the time the federation was being put into effect, the neighbouring Arab countries were gaining independence and with Eritrea's significant moslem population, this could have fanned Addis Ababa's centuries' old fear of Islamic encirclement and invasion.⁶⁴ In fact,

63. B.H. Selassie, "Eritrea and the United Nations", in The Eritrean Case op.cit., p.138.

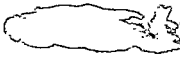
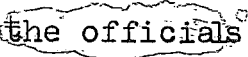
64. See Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978) p.8.

during the final debates leading to the General Assembly's resolution 390A(W) of 1950, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Aklilu Habtewold initially opposed the federal solution only to concede to it in the end "in the spirit of compromise".⁶⁵ Even then, Addis Ababa did not renounce its imperial ambition, for, during the drafting of Eritrea's constitution, its Foreign Minister insistently demanded that the balance of power should be in favour of the Emperor. Specifically, he demanded that the Emperor be empowered to appoint all executive officials in Eritrea, including a Governor-General, and to approve or reject all legislations. He further demanded that Amharic should be the sole official language.⁶⁶ In the end, however, the constitution that finally came out went to some length to insulate the Eritrean government against undue encroachment by the Ethiopian crown and, to buttress its special and autonomous status, Eritrea was allowed to have its own *glag* and Tigrinya and Arabic were recognized as its official languages.

However, no sooner had the federation come into effect that the imperial Ethiopian regime began to make moves whose effect was to destroy the major pillars of

65. Quoted in Selassie, "Eritrea and the United Nations", p.138.

66. See "Report of the Drafting of the Eritrean Constitution", *op.cit.*, and, Trevaskis, p.116.

the federal arrangement. For instance, under the arrangement, the Emperor had a representative in Eritrea with the constitutional functions of a ceremonial head of state. Essentially, his role was a formal one limited to the promulgation of legislations passed by the Eritrean Assembly and the reading of the Emperor's speeches. The only substantive power he had was the authority to return to the legislature any law which he felt amounted to an encroachment on federal jurisdiction.  The first such imperial representative, Andargachew Messai, who was the Emperor's son-in-law, saw his role in a different light as he arrogated to himself executive powers which properly belonged to the Eritrean government. Giorgis, then a young Ethiopian soldier in Eritrea admitted that  the officials posted to Eritrea did not know that Eritrea had any special status. According to him:

I know from personal experience how Eritrea was regarded by Ethiopian authorities. I was there as a young officer the year before federation ended. None of the officers who were sent to Eritrea were told what federation meant; we used to hear the word, but never understood it. For us, Eritrea was just another part of Ethiopia. In everyday life and in the government offices, I never felt any distinction between the Eritrean government and the federal government. The governor at the time, General Abiye Abebe, had full power to do whatever he wanted on behalf of the Emperor. There was no limit to his power.⁶⁷

As the imperial encroachment began to generate discontent within Eritrean elite circles, the Emperor's representative explicitly declared the intention of the Addis Ababa regime to render the federal arrangement nugatory. Speaking before the Eritrean Assembly on March 28, 1955, he declared that:

There are no internal or external affairs as far as the office of his imperial majesty's representative is concerned and there will be none in the future. The affairs of Eritrea concern Ethiopia as a whole and the Emperor. 68

And, in vindication of this position, when the imperial government revised its constitution in 1955, the revised (imperial) constitution, made no mention of Eritrea's special status. Rather, its first article simply reaffirmed the same provision in the earlier (1931) constitution to the effect that:

The empire of Ethiopia comprises all the territories, including islands and territorial waters under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown. Its sovereignty and territory are indivisible. 69

It was little wonder then that barely five years after Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia as an autonomous unit with the assurance of "the fullest respect and safeguards" for its institutions, traditions and religions, the imperial regime had systematically and completely under-

68. Quoted in Luther, Ethiopia Today, p. 147.

69. Revised Constitution of Ethiopia, (1955), Article I.

mined the Federal Act, the Eritrean constitution and its government which had then become hopelessly subjugated by the feudal and imperial regime in Addis Ababa.

A major indication of this development came when Eritrea's Prime Minister, Tedla Bairu, a member of the pro-Ethiopian Unionist Party was pressurised to resign his post as head of government in 1955 only to take up appointment as ambassador to Sweden. Tedla's problems stemmed from his attempts to resist the Imperial representative's encroachment on the integrity of his government and its domestic jurisdiction. His resignation was followed by that of the head of the Eritrean Legislative Assembly due to systematic erosion of his powers. The exit of these key members of the Eritrean government enabled the Emperor, acting through his representative, to install trusted and loyal cronies in major executive positions, thus fully subverting the autonomy of the Eritrean government.⁷⁰ With the Emperor's men now fully in the saddle, there followed incessant harrassment and intimidation of


70. B.H. Selassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation" in Davidson, et.al., p.16, also, Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1977) pp.22.

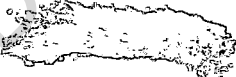
of opposition members (of the Independence Bloc as well as a final assault on the surviving symbols of Eritrean autonomy.⁷¹

In 1956 for instance, Tigrinya and Arabic, Eritrea's official languages, were replaced by Amharic as the language of official communication and instruction. This violation of the federal Act was greeted by strikes and protests which were mounted by students, workers and the intelligentsia. Throughout that year, students periodically boycotted classes and took to the streets in protest against the suppression of Eritrean institutions. When the Eritrean flag was lowered and replaced with that of Ethiopia, things came to a head with a general strike called in 1958 by the clandestine labour movement. In the aftermath, political intimidation and repression became the order of the day backed by a Preventive Detention Law promulgated ostensibly to maintain law and order but widely used to hound opposition elements into jail. At the height of this general repression, the Eritrean General Union of Labour Syndicates was banned, while newspapers were censored or proscribed

71. Ibid. See, also, Semere Haile, "The Roots of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict: The Erosion of the Federal Act", Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol.1, No.1, Summer, 1986, pp. 1-18; and, Christopher Clapham, Haile Selassie's Government (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 169.

outright and leaders of the opposition party jailed or exiled.⁷²

 the people of Eritrea were mired in severe economic hardship caused in part by the industrial slump of the post-world War II years and, in the main, by the deliberate and systematic underdevelopment of its economy through the Imperial regime's effort to 'refeudalize' the country and incorporate it firmly under a centralised Ethiopian system.⁷³ Thus, to compound an already severe economic crisis, several Eritrean industries were closed while some were dismantled and transferred to Addis Ababa.⁷⁴

In 1961, elections were held for the third Eritrean parliament under the full control of the Ethiopian government rather than the independent (Eritrean) electoral commission which had been established by the constitution.  only trusted cronies and sympathisers of the Ethiopian cause got elected into the Assembly, and, on November 14, 1962, this parliament was said to have voted for the dissolution of the federal

72. See James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down, pp. 20-21.

73. See Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1978) pp. 152-153; Richard Sherman, Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1980), from p.14, and, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.80.

74. Ibid., also, Firebrace and Holland, Never Kneel Down p.20.

arrangement and the annexation of Eritrea by the Imperial Ethiopian government. In his explanation, Emperor Haile Selassie stated that the "former federation relationship had the disadvantage of duplication of administrative apparatus and of involving unnecessary expenses".⁷⁵

Accounts of the events leading to the dissolution of the federation vary. While Ethiopian sources tend to portray it as a unanimous decision, taken freely, by a legally constituted Eritrean Assembly, most other sources, including Ethiopian and the American supporters of the defunct imperial regime, maintain that the "unilateral termination"⁷⁶ of the federation was effected through "bribery, intimidation and naked force".⁷⁷

Alan Ford had reported that:

Ethiopian newspapers reported the unanimous decision of the Eritrean Assembly of November 1962. They failed to report the intimidation preceding that vote or the presence of some recalcitrant assembly men in jail at the time the vote was taken.⁷⁸

75. See Keesings Contemporary Archives, November 24 - December 1, 1962, p. 19105.

76. See the testimony of J.H. Spencer, former American Chief Adviser to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Ninety-Fourth Congress, 2nd Session Ethiopia and The Horn of Africa (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1976) pp.16-30.

77. Tom J. Farer, War Clouds in the Horn of Africa, p.28.

78. Alan Ford, "Control of the Red Sea", National Review, Vol.18, No.14, April 15, 1966, p.315.

The former Ethiopian military officer, Dawit Giorgis has recently revealed the machinations culminating in the "reunification" vote:

After ten years of gradually taking over in Eritrea, Haile Selassie wanted to make his power official. It was crucial for him to have the Eritrean assembly vote for reunification with the empire. His main concern was that the Moselem members might prove recalcitrant or even refuse to vote. Tedla Ekubit, the police commander at that time, was the busiest man in Asmara that week as he made sure all assembly members were present to vote...

One week before the vote, my battalion, the 34th, was ordered to march through the city and to camp outside until four days after the vote. I co-commanded one of the companies that ringed Asmara during that time. It was clear from our orders that we were there in case of any trouble from the Assembly or the people. In addition to our battalion, the entire police force, the air force, and a detachment of infantry from another part of Ethiopia were all in hand, making their presence felt by marching through the streets and generally being as visible as possible.⁷⁹

With the formal dissolution of the federation, Eritrea became a mere administrative region, the fourteenth province of Ethiopia. Consequently, the imperial regime swiftly moved to wipe out the last vestiges of Eritrea's autonomy. First, Eritrean languages were now completely eliminated from schools while the parliament and political parties were disbanded. In addition, most top positions

79. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp. 80-81.

in the Eritrean bureaucracy were taken over by Amharas.⁸⁰ All these policies were carried out with hardly any international attention and, despite numerous petitions to the United Nations by exiled Eritrean leaders, the General Assembly was never formally appraised of the end of the federation.⁸¹ It was with this sense of neglect by the international community that Eritreans declared a war and struggle for self-determination through the Eritrean Liberation Front in September 1961.

Trevaskis, the erstwhile British administrator and foremost chronicler of Eritrean history, had anticipated this turn of events and concluded, rather prophetically that:

The temptation to subject Eritrea firmly under her (Ethiopian) control will always be great. Should she try to do so, she will risk Eritrean discontent and eventual revolt which with foreign sympathy and support might well disrupt both Eritrea and Ethiopia herself.⁸²

80. B.H. Selassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation" op.cit.

81. See "Cables of Protest by Eritrean Representatives Against Ethiopian Violations of the Federal Act". Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol.1, No.2 Winter, 1987, pp. 29-31.

82. Trevaskis, op.cit., p. 130.

CHAPTER III

THE ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ERITREAN NATIONALISM

The material basis of nationalism in most parts of Africa derived from the imposition of administrative and socio-economic activities by foreign powers on the various social and ethnic groups inhabiting contiguous territories. In each territory, this exigency of colonial rule tended to weld the different cultural and ethnic groups into a single political unit and a cohesive network of socio-economic activities. Corresponding to this objective factor of an integrative socio-economic base was the formation of a common consciousness of togetherness arising out of the ultimate struggle against the occupying force, and, tending, even if not necessarily to obliterate, but at least to attenuate hostility between, and promote understanding among, the different groups.¹

Eritreans rest their identity and claims to nationhood on a unifying experience under different occupying forces. Their nationalism, therefore, derives from this common perception of oppression and deprivation by these alien authorities.²

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1. See James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism, op.cit., especially pp.63-141; I.M. Lewis, "Pre-and Post-Colonial forms of Polity in Africa" in his Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa op.cit., pp.68-75; and Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins and the Politics of Nationalism (London: Methuen, 1977), pp.323-353.
 2. See the "Joint Declaration of the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front", in The Eritrean Case, op.cit., pp.17-31.

Indeed, the antecedents could be traced to the various forms of resistance against the incursions of foreign powers in the pre-colonial period. This earliest manifestation was however limited to localised and sporadic rebellions. One example was the resistance organised by Isaak, an independent ruler of the Eritrean plateau against Turkish invasion in 1557. Subsequently, resistance by one or the other of the Eritrean communities became a frequent occurrence and continued until the latter half of the nineteenth century.³ Hence, when resistance to European colonialism emerged, it was not an entirely new phenomenon but a continuation of a fairly long tradition of dissident nationalism.

Given the fact that Eritrea has been subjected to different forms of foreign overlordship - Italian, British and Ethiopian - its nationalism has necessarily reflected these differential patterns of external domination as well as the dynamics of internal social and economic transformations. As such, its origin and development should be examined in the phases corresponding to the different, but continuous, historical circumstances.

The earliest expressions of nationalist sentiments emerged during the first phase of Italian rule when the colonial state embarked on widespread expropriation of lands in

3. On Pre-colonial forms of resistance, see Richard Leonard, "European Colonization and the Socio-Economic Integration of Eritrea" in The Eritrean Case, pp.55-114 at p.84.

the Eritrean plateau. During the period from 1889 to 1930, the colony of Eritrea was mired in incessant peasant rebellions in several regions. In December 1894 for instance, the Residente of Saganeiti was captured by the Akkele-Guzai Chief who issued a call for a general nation-wide struggle to drive out the Italians.⁴ However, given the localised nature of such forms of resistance, they were easily contained, and as Italian pacification measures were intensified, they soon fizzled out.

As earlier noted, Italian colonial rule brought about in Eritrea profound socio-economic transformation. The processes of urbanisation and infrastructural development had created the embryo of a working class which more or less matured during the latter phase of colonial rule (from 1930 to 1941) when the extensive programme of industrialisation and infrastructural development was implemented. Again, the differential impact of colonial development on the social structures and property relations, particularly within the peasants' societies also had implications for the development of Eritrean nationalism. While large mass of serfs made up of nomadic and semi-nomadic herdsmen in the lowlands remained untouched by the intrusion of colonial capital, thus leaving substantially intact the feudal mode and relations of production, a tiny section, members of the aristocratic clan, esta-

4. Ibid., p.85.

blished themselves as traders in grains and livestock. In the highlands however, the various forms of land-holdings - communal, family and church - were progressively disrupted and so were the production and property relations. In those areas, the colonialists placed local power in the hands of some families and individuals who used it to enlarge their holdings thus creating the basis for the emergence of a rural bourgeoisie. Besides, large hectares of land were appropriated by the colonial government and designated as state lands. As a result, while some sections of the settled peasantry were transformed into a proletariat or sub-proletariat, others became linked directly and indirectly to the new urban markets and export trade. This latter group became the rural wing of the petit-bourgeoisie.⁵

On the whole, colonial development induced a process of integration by breaking up former local barriers and creating the bases for the emergence of a working class and urban petit-bourgeoisie. At a structural level, these features represented profound transformation because they, in turn, induced changes in life-styles, human relations, collapse of ethnic and linguistic barriers and, of course, the appearance of new antagonisms.

5. See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "European Colonial Rule and the Transformation of Eritrean Rural Life", in Horn of Africa, Vol.6, No.2 1983, pp.50-60.

As a result of the post-World War II industrial slump, British policy in Eritrea underwent drastic revision. Although the war-time imperatives had necessitated additional British investment in infrastructural development, they had no intention of making Eritrea into a staging area for further imperialist conquests or into a special colony, as the Italians had envisioned. British policy, in the short run, was to exploit Eritrea's potentials as a supply base during the war and there was no other design than keeping it in their sphere of influence and out of the hands of their major rivals. Indeed as soon as the war was over, the administration not only stopped all forms of investment, it also embarked upon the physical dismantling of plants and machinery which, along with stocks, were taken elsewhere. According to Pankhurst, the British removed or sold an estimated £86 million worth of industrial plants and equipment, including port facilities at Massawa and Assab, factories producing cement, potash and salt as well as railway equipment.⁶ This development also featured in the report of the Four Powers Commission which stated that industrial firms having stocks and equipment valued at £85 million were obliged to close down under the British administration.

6. E.S. Pankhurst, Eritrea on the Eve (Woodford Green: Lalibela House, 1952). p.38.

Also, perhaps out of sheer expediency, the British retained the Italian administrative machinery with only minimal changes and, in this way, governmental processes and structures remained as they were in the past. Although some measure of "Eritreanisation" occurred due to the limited operation of "indirect rule", the insufficiency of British personnel made it expedient to retain Italian officials in several governmental positions. For instance, Italian judges continued to decide civil suits. Also, in the economic sector, preference was accorded to Italian merchants and artisans seeking commercial licenses on the ostensible ground that they possessed greater skills and capital. Moreover, the value of the colonial currency, the lira, was drastically devalued, credit lines tightened and local taxation increased. The combined effect of these practices was a severe economic downturn leading to mass unemployment particularly in the fledging urban centres. Even for those who remained employed, the situation was hardly better as the cost of living rose prohibitively by about 611 per cent while wages rose only by 60 per cent.⁷

Consequent upon this slump, the urban social classes which have grown in size due to the war-induced economic and educational and commercial reforms introduced in the early period of British occupation were then confronted with

7. See Richard Leonard, op.cit., p.97.

a new reality. The middle class which had looked upon the British as liberators and the embryonic intelligentsia which aspired to profound changes and to taking over the posts occupied by Italians soon had their expectations frustrated. The natural consequence of this development was a deep feeling of discontent among these classes which they gave vent to in a recurrent outbursts of anger, or, in what Trevaskis described variously as "Eritrean "effervescence", "hostility" and "urban xenophobia". In fact, by the mid-1940s, the urban working and middle classes had begun to rise up in revolt against the British colonial authority.⁸

The reaction of the peasantry was similar. In most parts of the countryside, the British left intact the socio-economic structures which they found in place but compounded the peasants problems by increased taxation imposed to reduce the costs of administering the colony. Moreover, the provisional administration exacerbated the pressure on land, by expropriating yet more of ^{the} most fertile lands. In the plateau, for example, about 10,000 acres of land were expropriated and conceded to Italian farmers. This was at a time when Eritrean soldiers in the former (Italian) colonial army were returning to their villages to seek some means of

8. Trevaskis, Eritrea. op.cit., and, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies (New York: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989).

livelihood. Worse still, several workers rendered jobless as a result of the depression also tended to drift back to the countryside at this time - thus aggravating the pressure on land.⁹

As a result of these multiple pressures and contradictions, peasant discontent and insubordination flared up in the early 1940s leading to sporadic rebellions which continued virtually throughout the war. In the highlands, peasants organised armed bands which between 1941 and 1945 attacked Italian farms and property.¹⁰ Yet, the most virulent reaction, which would have far reaching political consequences, came from the lowlands. In 1942, some Tigre serfs organised an uprising that influenced serfs generally throughout the Tigre-speaking population. These serfs, up against their feudal lords, refused to pay taxes and demanded their emancipation from the excruciating burdens of traditional feudal obligations. Despite the abolition of serf-subordination and obligations, this uprising (comprising about 90 per cent of the population of the lowlands) grew and spread rapidly to ^{assume} the dimension of a real peasants' movement which would later constitute a crucial base for the nationalist movement.¹¹

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10. Ibid., p.35.

11. See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Nationalism, Peasant Politics and the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea", Review of African Political Economy, No.30, September 1984, pp.48-57, and, Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea.

From the foregoing, while not disregarding the role of other factors such as race and religion, it can be contended that the declining material conditions in the post-war years contributed tremendously to the heightening of common political consciousness among the people of Eritrea. In other words, the responses of the various classes to the appeal of "dissident nationalism" was conditioned essentially by the perception of their own material position and, as such, initially saw the struggle as an elemental struggle for survival. Indeed, before the end of British administration, a sense of common fate had clearly developed and the various nationalities of Eritrea had, more or less, come to terms with the concept of a common nationhood and nationalism.

The Beginning of Organised Political Activity:

Consequent upon the Four Powers agreement of September 1946 concerning the former Italian colonies, the fate of Eritrea immediately became a subject of intense political agitation among its people. In October of that year, the British toured the country to explain the Four Powers' decision and to announce the right of formation of political parties and publishing of newspapers. Almost at once, political parties and newspapers were formed by Eritreans. The spontaneous emergence of these political associations was hardly surprising given the fact that, all along, the British administration had tolerated and, in some cases, tacitly encouraged low-

level political activity.¹² Indeed, prior to the liberalising measures announced in 1946, a semi-clandestine political body among the plateau christians and the serf-emancipation movement, both nationalist-oriented, had emerged. These movements were however neither well-organised nor well financed during the early period, but, after 1946, they became better organised and metamorphosed into the dominant political groups in the country.¹³

First to emerge was the Moslem League which was built upon the serf emancipation movement. Formed in December 1946 at a meeting in Keren at which all the Muslim communities were represented, the League called for the independence of Eritrea. It had the two-fold characteristic of being anti-feudal and religious and was particularly strong in the western lowlands, from where it derived three-quarters of its numerical strength, evaluated by the UN Commission to be about 40 to 41 percent of the total Eritrean population.

After the League came the Eritrean Liberal Progressive Party. Formed in 1947, it was largely a highland party and

12. According to Ethiopian accounts, British liberalism was a deliberate ploy to guarantee itself a future in Eritrea by encouraging Eritreans to counter Emperor Haile Selassie's claim to the former Italian colony. See, for instance, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1989) p.77.

13. For a historical and comprehensive account of the political parties in Eritrea, see Lloyd Ellingson, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950", Journal of African History, Vol.18(2) 1977, pp. 261-281.

its strength was estimated by the UN Commission to be about 4 to 5 percent of the population. When Woldeab Wolde Mariam, its most dynamic figure, became the leader, the Liberal Party became a very effective political force on the plateau, supported by a large number of christian highland intellectuals, urban workers and the petit-bourgeoisie.

These two parties constituted the moving force of the independence struggle with the social base made up of an alliance of peasants, workers and the urban petit-bourgeois classes.¹⁴ Apart from these two dominant parties, however, there were others such as the Eritrea for Eritreans Party, New Era Pro-Italian Party and the National Party of Massawa. In 1949, all the pro-independence political groups came together under a united front known as the Independence Bloc.¹⁵

About the same period, there also emerged a political tendency which favoured the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. This movement was championed by the Unionist Party of Eritrea which was formed in 1946. There were two major factors behind the crystallisation and development of this unionist tendency. First was the fear of the continuation of Italian colonialism. In the early years of British occupation, the primary emphasis of the various political movements was the

14. Lionel Cliffe, "The Social Basis of Eritrea's Nationhood" in Eritrea: The Way Forward, Proceedings of a Conference on Eritrea by the United Nations Association, (London: United Nations Association of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, 1986), p.31.

15. Ellingson, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-50" op.cit.

termination of colonial rule and those who favoured union with Ethiopia argued that it was the only means of achieving this objective. At the fore-front of the unification crusade was the Coptic church. Having lost its lands to the Italian colonial state, the church saw union with Ethiopia as a means of regaining its erstwhile possessions and privileges. It therefore mounted fierce propoganda and religious pressures which went a long way in rallying a significant section of the plateau christian community behind the unionist cause.¹⁶

Beside the church, another social force behind the unionist campaign was the urban petit-bourgeois class whose expectations had been frustrated by the provisional British administration. Since British occupation did not fundamentally change the discriminatory social, economic and administrative practices entrenched by the Italians, the emergent middle class which had seen itself as natural legatees of the Italian colonial estate regarded such solutions like British or Italian trusteeship, or, even independence, as indirect means of prolonging colonial rule and Italian-settler privileges in Eritrea. Unification with Ethiopia, then, was for this group of people a surety for realising their aspirations. A third social category in the unionist trail consisted of feudal chieftains and notables

16. See David Pool, "Britrean Nationalism" in I.M. Lewis (ed.) Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa, op.cit. pp.175-193, particularly, pp. 181-2.

of the western lowlands, who, having been worsted by the serf-emancipation movement, saw no source of succour other than unification with the feudal Ethiopian state.¹⁷

The second factor behind the unification campaign was the role of Ethiopia, specifically, its assistance to the Unionist Party and other pro-union groups. As soon as Emperor Haile Selassie was rehabilitated to his throne, after a forced exile occasioned by the Italian occupation of 1935, he renewed Addis-Ababa's claims to Eritrea. In one of his frequent exhortations, the Emperor declared:

Eritrean people! You were separated from your mother Ethiopia and were put under the yoke of the enemy, and under the yoke of the enemy you still remain... I have come to restore the independence of my country, including Eritrea, whose people will henceforth dwell under the shade of the Ethiopian flag.¹⁸

In staking out his claims to the colony, Selassie exploited the anxieties of those groups in Eritrea - the feudal elements, christian clergy and the urban petit-bourgeoisie - who then became his natural allies in the quest for a 'Greater Ethiopia'.¹⁹ To each of these groups, he held out promises of return of feudal privileges such as land-holdings and high positions in the administration of Eritrea envisioned as the fourteenth province of Ethiopia. The Coptic church, for one, looked at Addis Ababa not only

17. Ibid.

18. Quoted in Trevaskis, Eritrea, p.58.

19. Ibid., pp. 58-59.

as a

as a cultural or religious point of reference but ~~as~~ surety for recouping its lost privileges. As a well organised and historically entrenched institution held in utmost and age-old reverence by the highland peasantry and the entire christian community, the church was an extremely effective instrument for the unionist cause and was able to sway large sections of the plateau population behind it. Trevaskis - had depicted the role of the church in the highland thus:

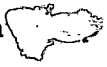
By 1942, every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village had become a center of Ethiopian nationalism and popular religious festivals such as the Maskal (the feast of the Cross) had become occasions for open displays of Ethiopian patriotism. The cathedrals, the monasteries and village churches would be festooned with Ethiopian flags and sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal language.²⁰


In the heat of this religious pressure, the church announced that those who supported independence would not be baptised, married, or buried and would neither receive communion or absolution, in effect, threatening ex-communication in a traditionally religious society.²¹

As the campaigns progressed, the political situation gradually changed. While some groups broke away from the two dominant parties, others came into existence. Nonetheless, the situation appeared to stabilise with the coalescence

20. Ibid., p.60.

21. Ibid., see, also, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea, especially, pp. 146-148.

of the various parties into two main blocs. Those groups advocating for independence, notably the Muslim League, the Independent Eritrea Party and the Italian Settler Party formed the Independence Bloc which later became the Eritrea Democratic Front in 1951, while those favoured union with Ethiopia remained under the Unionist Party. However, no sooner had these coalitions emerged than the unity and strength of the pro-independence bloc began to wane.²² A few factors led to this development. First was the Ethiopian-backed fierce propaganda and violent campaigns of the unionists, including assassination attempts on pro-independence leaders.²³ That apart, and more crucial, was the breakdown of Muslim solidarity. Not only did a few Muslim leaders come to terms with the Negus, Ethiopia's liaison officer in Asmara, the feudal lords of the Western lowlands formed their own Moslem League which advocated the creation of an independent state for the Western province and, therefore, no longer opposed the incorporation of the rest of Eritrea  into Ethiopia.²⁴

One reason behind the breakdown of Muslim solidarity was the resentment of the western lowlanders for the Pro-Italy Party despite,  or more appropriately, because

22. Yordanos Gebre-Medhin, "Eritrea: Background to Revolution", op.cit., p.58.

23. Ibid.

24. Guido Bimbi, "The National Liberation Struggle and the Liberation Fronts" in The Eritrean Case (Rome: Research and Information Center on Eritrea, 1982), p.176.

of, its subscription to the independence cause.²⁵ Formed in September 1947 and labelled simply as the Pro-Italy Party, the subsequent addition of the words "New Eritrea" did not conceal its fundamental orientation and neither did it mitigate the animosity of most Eritreans towards the Italian colonialists who were behind the party. The admission of this party into the Independence Bloc, therefore, was a serious political error with debilitating consequences for the movement. First, it led to a loss of confidence in the leadership and generated major dissension within the coalition. Secondly, it contributed to the formation of yet more breakaway parties thereby fuelling the fragmentation of the independence bloc.²⁶

Given the extent of foreign interest and intrigues in the colony then, it was inevitable that the long-standing contradictions within the Eritrean social formation intensified at that crucial point. Apart from Ethiopia, Italy and the United States were equally excited by the prospects of influence in, if not outright control of, a post-colonial Eritrea.²⁷ It was in this context that the US-sponsored federal solution brought to a close a phase of Eritrean

25. Ibid.

26. For a graphic description of the evolution and changes within the Independence Bloc, see the appendix to Richard Leonard's "European Colonization and the Socio-Economic Integration of Eritrea" in The Eritrean Case, op.cit., p.111.

27. See Harold G. Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974: The Politics of Empire (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

nationalism and yet opened another.

Just like the first, the second phase of Eritrean nationalism was a direct product of material conditions that prevailed during the period of the federation. Specifically, this latter phase was a product of the contradictions between the liberal-democratic constitution of Eritrea and the feudal regime in Ethiopia as well as of the contradictions of a changed economic dispensation. No sooner had the federation been effected than Addis Ababa's attempt to resolve these contradictions imposed severe economic and political strains on various strata of the Eritrean society. In response, the people mounted increasingly popular uprisings, protests and demonstrations. Even the embryonic Eritrean petit-bourgeois class, which had the hope of transforming itself into an authentic national bourgeoisie, soon had its hopes systematically dashed by the imperial government.

Progressively, Ethiopian repression and erosion of Eritrean autonomy gradually alienated both those who had opposed and those who had supported the unification arrangement.²⁸ In October 1953, all political parties, with the exception of the Unionist Party, sent an appeal to the United Nations requesting it to prevail on Ethiopia to respect the Federal Act. Also, on May 22, 1954, a resolu-

28. Guido Bimbi, "The National Liberation Struggle and the Liberation Fronts", op.cit., pp. 177-178.

tion condemning "Ethiopia interference in Eritrean affairs" was adopted by the Eritrean Assembly with many unionist representatives voting in the affirmative.²⁹ Things came to a head when all parties (except the Unionist) trade unions, and newspapers were declared illegal and banned from existence. This clamp-down was accompanied by widespread harassment and persecution of opposition leaders. For instance, in 1953, the leader of the Eritrean labour movement, Woldeab Wolde-Mariam was wounded in an assassination attempt and subsequently forced into exile. According to Erlich "systematic terrorism and other measures against individuals who failed to see the light of reunification proved effective".³⁰

As soon as the revised imperial constitution of 1955 was put into force, the violation of Eritrean autonomy and the Federal Act was completed. Amharic was imposed as the official language and the jurisdiction of Ethiopian courts extended to Eritrea. In the event, the Head of the Eritrean government, Tedla Bairu was obliged to resign and replaced by Asfaha Wolde-Mikael, apparently, a more trusted unionist.³¹

²⁹: Ibid., p. 159.

³⁰: Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978, p. 9.

³¹: For a detailed account of the violations of the Federal Act, see Semere Haile, "The Roots of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict: The Erosion of the Federal Act", Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1986, pp. 1-18. See, also, the document titled "Ethiopia's Legal Moves to Weaken the Government of Eritrea", in Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 1987, pp. 26-28, and, Christopher Clapham, Haile Selassie's Government, p. 198.

Once in power, Asfaha, backed by a preventive detention law intensified the harassment of opposition figures and general repression of the populace, several of whom were sent to jail or forced into exile. It was amidst this atmosphere that ^{the} Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) was formed in 1959 with its social base in the networks of exiled workers, students, the intelligentsia and traders. The formation of the organisation was inspired by some exiled Eritrean leaders like Woldean Wolde-Mariam whose daily broadcasts from Cairo fuelled the nationalist flames at home.³²

Although its activities were concentrated in Asmara and other urban places in the highlands and the lowlands, the ELM organised campaigns against Ethiopian forces during its brief existence. The highland section of the movement was known as the "Mahber Shewate" (the Committee of Seven), while the lowland wing was referred to as "Harakat' atahrir Al-Eritrea" (the Eritrea Liberation Movement) or, simply, "Haraka". These factions organised protests by Eritrean workers, students and traders. They also raised funds, and prepared documents which were widely circulated. The overall objective behind all this was the attainment of Eritrean independence. However, due to some organisational

32. On the antecedents to, and origin of, the ELM, see, Bereket Habte Selassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation", in Basil Davidson et.al. op.cit., especially from pp. 41-42.

weaknesses, particularly the poor, (or, outright lack of) coordination of its activities, the movement soon crumbled under the repressive responses, such as brutal police raids and mass arrests mounted by the Ethiopian regime.³³

Notwithstanding its brief spell, the movement provided a rallying focus of opposition to Ethiopian imperial policy over Eritrea and offered a model of clandestine political activity which succeeding organisations built upon. Indeed, its remnants constituted the nucleus of a successor movement. Moreover, it carried the national struggle to a stage where there was no alternative other than a popularly based armed struggle. It was, therefore, not surprising, following the collapse of the ELM, and the impossibility of legal or semi-legal forms of political organisation, that the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) emerged in 1961 and immediately declared an armed struggle for the liberation of Eritrea.

The Eritrean Liberation Front, 1961-1969:

The ELF was formed by a group of Eritrean leaders living in exile in Cairo under the leadership of Idris Mohammed Adam, who had been a president of the Eritrean Assembly. Other founding leaders included Ibrahim Sultan Ali, former Secretary-General of the Islamic League Party. Earlier in 1960 when these leaders visited Saudi Arabia, the Eritrean community there had enjoined them to form an organisation and start an armed struggle. Similar calls were made by

33. Ibid.

exiled Eritreans in other Arab countries, especially the active students' body in Egypt.³⁴

The initial impetus behind the formation of the Front was the exigency of creating an organisation through which representation could be made to the United Nations. However, before this organisation could find its feet, Ahmad Idris Awate, a former NCO in the Sudanese army, had launched an armed struggle in the western lowlands with a small guerrilla band comprised of Eritreans who had also served in the colonial army. It was this Awate's armed band that constituted the core of the ELF's fighting force, and was made up of recruits predominantly from the western lowlands of Barka. Soon, other Eritreans, especially students and workers from the highlands, the urban centers, and from neighbouring countries, such as Sudan and Egypt, joined the army.³⁵

At the onset, the ELF was based in the countryside and its military activities were limited to sporadic attacks on isolated military targets. As Bell observed, "the ELF seemed content, or doomed to wage an obscure Shifita struggle.

34. For an authoritative account of the origin of the ELF, see, Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, especially pp. 63-73; also, Richard J. Lobban, Eritrea Liberation Front (Pasadena: Mungar African Library, 1972).

35. Ibid.

Seldom did it engage in visible operations - and many of those could have been simple endemic brigandage".³⁶ With time, however, the organisation began to wax in strength for, as news of ~~the~~ armed struggle spread, its ranks steadily swelled. To a large extent, Ethiopia's repressive measures helped in swelling the ranks of the insurgents. Throughout the 1960s, the army operated in Eritrea with the mentality of a conqueror thereby further alienating broad segments of the populace. Thus, as Dawit Wolde Giorgis recounted:

Between 1963 and 1965, there were less than 500 guerillas, but as the army grew more indiscriminate and sought to punish the community as a whole, many other Eritreans were affected. Out of anger and disillusionment, they joined the ELF. Many of them were christians, broadening the rebels' base... The inevitable result (of the Ethiopian army's atrocities) was that increasing numbers of Eritreans grew to fear and hate Ethiopian soldiers and Ethiopia. If Haile Selassie had carefully planned a formula for alienating the Eritrean people, he couldn't have done better.³⁷

Some external developments also contributed to the growth of the nationalist organisation. First was the ouster of Sudan's Marshal ~~A~~but and the assumption of power of a new regime in Khartoum which approved of the Front's activities on its own territory along the borders with Ethiopia. Another external factor was the support from the Arab states which gave

36. Bomyer, J. Bell, "Endemic Insurgency and International Order: The Eritrean Experience", ORBIS, Vol.18, No.2, Summer, 1974, p. 434.

37. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p. 82.

financial, material and diplomatic assistance.³⁸

By 1967, the ELF had built up a viable fighting movement with the potentials for a real national movement. It, however, lacked a clear political orientation and a disciplined organisation. Although an attempt had been made at reorganising the movement in 1965 when its numerous armed units were grouped into five military zones, each under a relatively autonomous regional commander, this reorganisation was carried out along ethnic and religious lines thereby stamping on the Front an unhealthy sectarian outlook. Rather than enhance the strength of the movement, the reorganisation exacerbated its ideological and organisational weaknesses. Recruits were distributed to the regional commands on the bases of religion, nationality and tribe and each commander became a veritable warlord with absolute control over zonal operations, paying little regard to the need for coordination and the overall objective of the organisation.³⁹

True, the ELF had expanded its scope, recruitment and military capacity, its structure, according to Pool,

38. See Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", New Left Review, No. 67, May-June 1971, pp. 57-67.

39. On the ideological and organisational weaknesses of the ELF, see, Linda Heiden, "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence", Monthly Review, Vol.30, No.2, June 1978, pp.13-28; David Pool, "Eritrean Nationalism", I.M. Lewis (ed.) op.cit., pp. 175-193.

"was anti-national", as it tended to exacerbate "social and cultural divisions rather than minimizing or transforming them".⁴⁰ Heiden has similarly concluded, tracing the problem to the social origins of the Front. In her words, the ELF:

... was conceived and organized as a nationalist group, led by feudalists and members of the growing national bourgeoisie and upper petty bourgeoisie. The objectives of the struggle, beyond independence, were not outlined in a clear programme. Fighting was sporadic, with little unified military or coherent political analysis behind it.⁴¹

These weaknesses within the front, particularly the absence of a coherent and unified field and battle strategy, were fully exploited by the Ethiopian regime in its devastating military offensives against the Eritrean movement in 1967. In the aftermath, internal criticisms of, and outright opposition to, its style and modus operandi came from the ranks of politically conscious urban workers, students and intelligentsia who were then just finding their feet in the organization. Their major demands included the need for a unified armed struggle and greater participation of rank and file in decision-making. These demands were encapsulated in such slogans as "Democracy and Unity", "Democracy for the Fighters"

40. David Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard: The Emergence of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front", Review of African Political Economy, No.19, September - December 1980, p. 41.

41. Linda Heiden, "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence", p.17.

and "Leadership in the field".⁴²

As the criticisms got louder, the Front became engulfed in a serious internal dispute between 1967 and 1970. Despite all efforts to resolve the crisis, through a series of abortive conferences, the division got deeper and culminated in a desultory internal blood-letting. For, as the opposition, ^{became} more restive, the ELF leadership embarked on widespread repression and liquidation of dissidents leading, inevitably, to the split within the movement and the formation of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF).

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front:

The EPLF emerged in April 1970 out of a coalition of three dissident groups that escaped liquidation by the ELF leadership.⁴³ At inception, it was an amalgam of some educated eastern Muslims and Christian highlanders. In no time, however, its programme of social transformation and secular nationalism attracted increased membership, including students and intellectuals from the universities. Shortly after it was formed, the EPLF issued a document - Our Struggle and its Goals - in which its political programme was articulated.

42. See David Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard", and, Linda Heiden, "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence", op.cit.

43. Ibid. See, also, Guido Bimbi, "The National Liberation Struggle and the Liberation Fronts", op.cit., pp. 181-2.

In reaction to this development, the ELF at a congress in Sudan in December 1971, resolved to physically liquidate the new organisation and it immediately launched an armed attack on it. Thus, from then, the Eritrean movement turned against itself in a fratricidal war which only came to an end in January 1975. In the heat of the war, the EPLF waxed in strength and came out of it to become the dominant vanguard of the Eritrean struggle.

In the period up till 1977, the EPLF launched incessant hit and run raids from its countryside base in a typical guerilla warfare manner. Afterwards, there occurred a transformation from guerilla to revolutionary warfare in which the Front went on the offensive and engaged the Ethiopian forces in positional combat, wresting much of the Eritrean countryside and cities from Addis Ababa's control. It however had to make a "strategic withdrawal" in the wake of massive Soviet intervention on the side of Addis Ababa.⁴⁴

Early in 1982, the EPLF successfully resisted the largest offensive ever mounted by the Ethiopian army in Eritrea. This offensive, the sixth, code-named "Red Star

44. See Christopher Clapham, "The Soviet Experience in the Horn of Africa" in E.J. Feuchtwanger and Peter Nailor (ed.) The Soviet Union and The Third World (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 202-223, especially at p. 214.

Campaign' involved fifteen divisions of about 100,000 troops armed with a new range of sophisticated weaponry, but, like the earlier offensives, it ended without the Ethiopians making any headway.⁴⁵

After a prolonged stalemate, the military balance began to shift in favour of the EPLF in 1984. In the first six months of that year, it engaged the Ethiopian army in tank battles and recorded spectacular victories.⁴⁶ In addition, it also captured valuable ammunition as well as artillery and anti-aircraft guns which it immediately put to use. As the EPLF became highly mechanised and mobile, it has continued to attack Ethiopian positions in occasional forays launched outside its base in the country side.⁴⁷

In March 1988, the EPLF recorded what was widely acclaimed as its "most impressive victory" in the 29-year old war when it routed the Ethiopian army in the battle of Afabet. Thousands of men from the 14th, 19th and 21st divisions of

45. For vivid account of this operation, see Colin Legum (ed.) Africa Contemporary Record, 1982/83, p. B146, and, Keesing's Contemporary Archives, September 10, 1982, p.31685.

46. Early in 1984, the EPLF captured Tessenei and defeated the Ethiopian Forces in several battles along the Northern Alghena Front. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives Vol. 30, August 1984, p. 33015.

47. For these military developments, see James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Neel Down (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984) pp. 51-60.

the Ethiopian army were killed or captured with several thousands others fleeing in disarray, abandoning tons of ammunitions and weapons including T-55 tanks and rocket-launchers which the EPLF captured intact.⁴⁸ In addition to these spoils of war, the Front captured what was described as a "more priceless booty": three Soviet advisers to the Ethiopian command.⁴⁹ Following the fall of Afabet the EPLF further stepped up the battle and has now virtually liberated the whole of Eritrea from Ethiopian control except for the capital, Asmara, and the port city of Assab.⁵⁰

Alongside the military pursuits, the EPLF has adopted a political strategy aimed at fully incorporating the peasantry, urban working class and the intelligentsia into the nationalist struggle. Its programme of national democratic revolution stresses the need for national unity through the elimination of narrow ethnic, religious and regional divisions.⁵¹ Above all, it aims at establishing a society free from all forms of exploitation and in which there would be no

48. See Africa Confidential, Vol.29, No.9, 29 April 1988, pp.1-3; Time, 1 August 1988, pp. 32-35; The Independent (London), 5 April 1988, and The Guardian(London) 4 April, 1988.

49. For more details, see The Middle East (London), No.164, June 1988, pp. 13-15.

50. See New African, No.275, August 1990.

51. See The National Democratic Programme of the EPLF of 31, January, 1977.

privileges based on class, gender or religion. In a statement in 1973 titled 'Why we are waging a struggle', it declared that the struggle was being waged:

So that the people may own the land and be the beneficiaries of its fruits. In order to transfer ownership of factories and commerce into the hands of a people's government so that the democratic rights of workers may be fully safeguarded. So that women may regain their full rights and participate in work and politicize with equality. In order to work for the development of industry and agriculture for our country cannot move forward without such development. In order to eradicate diseases and ignorance so that our people can be enlightened and healthy...52.

Over the years, the EPLF has developed profoundly intense ties with the Eritrean people in pursuit of its political and military strategies. In the liberated areas in the countryside, it has set up new structures based on full participation by the people and this has led to significant transformation of production and property relations.⁵³ For instance, it has implemented a programme for peasants as well

52. Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Selected Articles from EPLF Publications, (1973-1980). May 1982, p. 27.

53. See James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down, op.cit., especially pp. 29-44, Lionel Cliffe, "The Social Basis of Eritrea's Nationhood", in, Eritrea: The Way Forward, op.cit., pp. 28-36. See also the accounts of Basil Davidson in The Guardian (London), 4 April, 1988; and Steve Crawshaw, in The Independent (London), 6 April, 1988.

as political education for its cadres and within the mass organisations. The land reform was based on private ownership with an emphasis on distribution to the landless. In areas where it had a strong presence, collective ownership and co-operative production were introduced through the peasant organisations.

Consequent upon the federation with Ethiopia, the defunct imperial regime had transformed the erstwhile communal lands into private holdings, leading to the rise of a nascent agrarian bourgeoisie which then used the new-found status to appropriate more and more land and privileges. The land reform, therefore, was, for the EPLF, a major political strategy based on the convictions that an organised peasantry constitutes a revolutionary force and that the struggle for national liberation and social emancipation must involve the people directly. In each village, peasants were organised into cells constituting the core of political structures led by the most conscious of them.⁵⁴

A corollary to this political strategy is the programme of popular political education which all fighters and non-fighters alike within the mass organisations have to undergo. In this programme, the cadres are given basic exposure to the tools of class analysis with special reference to the

54. On the EPLF's land reform, see James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, op.cit. pp.35-38, and, Tony Barnett, "Agriculture in the Eritrean Revolution" in Basil Davidson et.al. op.cit., pp. 111-124.

Eritrean society. In this regard, classic texts of Marx, Lenin and Mao have been translated into Tigrinya and other local languages. Within the mass organisations, emphasis is placed on inculcating basic literacy skills, while for the fighters, political education goes side by side with military training. This symbiosis between the military and political dimensions of the Front's strategy has won it tremendous support and expanded its membership.

Moreover, in spite of the difficult conditions of the war, the EPLF provides a wide range of social services including medical, transportation and supply of basic necessities. Most of its fighters are trained in diverse skills and it is common for armed squads to enter villages to discuss the Front's goals, listen to the people's problems, conduct literacy classes and provide crucial services ranging from medical aid to construction works. Indeed, throughout the areas it controls, the Front operates as a veritable government without a state.⁵⁵

One cardinal policy of the EPLF is an active campaign against deep-seated divisions deriving from religion and sex. In its National Democratic Programme and in practice, it consciously works towards the unity and equality of all

55. Time, 1 August, 1988, p. 33. For more details on the social aspects of the EPLF's struggle, see, in the collection by Davidson *et al*, Mary Dines, "The Land, the People and the Revolution", pp. 125-139, and Francois Houtart, "The Social Revolution in Eritrea", pp. 83-110.

nationalities and all Eritreans. For instance, it has made strenuous efforts to combat prejudices and practices which work against women with the result that they now play active role in the movement accounting for 30 per cent of its membership and 13 per cent of its combat force.⁵⁶

Another fundamental plank of the EPLF's struggle is its policy of self-reliance which it adopted not only as an ideological watchword but also as a matter of expediency. As external assistance increasingly tapered off, it was forced to optimise the use of available local materials including scraps from used weapons. In the meantime, this policy serves as the means of meeting immediate material needs while it is also seen as a future strategy for development and safeguarding the independence of the Eritrean nation. As Lionel Cliffe has explained:

Given these particular circumstances of a virtual absence of outside material or diplomatic support or of sanctuary, the achievements of the Eritrean struggle are the more remarkable, but clearly force the movement back on its own resources. Concretely this means developing internal bases, consequently having to, but also being able to, devote all energies to developing their strength; and in turn the military strength requires considerable self-reliance, especially in materials, technical skills and personnel.⁵⁷

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56. David Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis...", p.46, and James Firebrace with Stuart Holland, pp. 38-41.
57. Lionel Cliffe, "The Eritrean Liberation Struggle in Comparative Perspective" in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed) The Long Struggle of Eritrea, p.97.
 Far back in 1978, the Keesings Contemporary Archives had observed that the EPLF "had to increasingly to rely on its own resources". See its edition of May 26, 1978, p.288991.

With the EPLF, then, the struggle has gone beyond the mere objective of political independence to encompass a global strategy for the radical transformation of the Eritrean society. This synthesis between the pursuit of national independence and social emancipation has become the hallmark of the Eritrean movement - a fact which sets it apart from the African nationalist movements of the 1940s and the 50s.⁵⁸

One major problem that has dogged the movement was the inability of the nationalist organisations to come together under a united front in spite of the realisation by the two major groups (ELF and EPLF) of the imperative of unity. The EPLF, for its part, repeatedly stated that the unity,

58. Unlike the earlier nationalist movements in Africa whose ideologies apotheosised the political dimension of independence, the Eritrean struggle offers a new conception of liberation in which the objectives of economic independence and social transformation have become equally crucial. This strategy of the EPLF, also shared by the liberation movements (of the ex-Portuguese colonies), Mozambique, Angola, as well as Zimbabwe, constitutes a radical departure from the earlier neo-colonial model and has been described as "the second wave" of African independence. For more on this perspective, see Guido Bimbi, "The National Liberation Struggle and the Liberation Fronts", *op.cit.* from p. 183, also, Basil Davidson, "An Historical Note" in Davidson *et al*, pp. 11-15, and L. Cliffe, "The Eritrean Struggle in Comparative Perspective", *op.cit.*

of the movement is a "strategic question" and a "decisive factor for the achievement of national liberation, peace and prosperity".⁵⁹

Since the end of the fratricidal war, the question of unity has elicited different approaches from the two fronts. While the EPLF advocated functional unity, arguing that a principled unity would ultimately evolve when a common level of awareness and ideological unity had been reached, the ELF, on the other hand, wanted complete unity at all levels immediately. These different positions stemmed from a fundamental divergence as to the character, objective and motive forces of the armed struggle. Unlike the EPLF which maintained that a protracted war of independence must be accompanied by revolutionary transformation of society, the ELF, on the other hand, had as its main objectives immediate military victory and political independence.⁶⁰ Indeed, this fundamental difference in outlook had further widened the gulf between the two.

All the same, the imperatives of the war have induced some measure of convergence as the fronts gradually, even if

59. See Adulis, Vol.1 No.9, March 91985. (Published by the EPLF's Central Bureau of Foreign Relations).

60. See B.H. Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, op.cit., pp. 68-9.

hesitantly, warmed up to each other. The process had however been complicated by internal divisions within each of the fronts. In 1975, a faction within the EPLF, made up of its foreign mission based in Beirut under the veteran nationalist, Osman Saleh Sabbe, held a series of meetings with the ELF and called for unification of the fronts. This call was immediately repudiated by the EPLF and led to a complete split ^{within} the body and the emergence of Sabbe's "third front", the Eritrean Liberation Front - Popular Liberation Forces (ELF/PLF).⁶¹

Despite this setback, further attempts were made towards unity, culminating in the historic agreement of October 20, 1977. In this accord, both parties adopted the following common positions: (i) full independence for Eritrea, (ii) opposition to all forces that stand in their way towards the above goal, (iii) guaranteeing the democratic rights of Eritrean people, (iv) establishment of friendly relations, with all progressive forces in the world. Moreover, they agreed to establish a single national democratic front and a Joint Supreme Political Leadership (JSPL) to guide the implementation of the accord.

At a meeting in April 1978, the JSPL as well as joint committees for coordinating military, economic, foreign,

61. Ibid., p.69.

political and propaganda affairs were set up. Subsequently, in March 1979, the JSPL charted out a common military strategy for the armed struggle and decided that Northern Sahel would be the rear base of both fronts and that the integration of the two armies would commence in May of that year. When it came to implementing these decisions, some obstacles and disagreements resurfaced and rendered the crucial aspects of the agreement unworkable. Although the two fronts later met and reaffirmed the accord, no concrete effort was made by way of implementing it. Indeed, the old acrimony soon resurfaced and the relations between the two organisations steadily deteriorated. By mid-1980, the whole unity accord had broken down completely and the situation got worse when internal schisms ripped the ELF into factions in 1980.

Following several moves by the League of Arab states and the Islamic Conference Organisation, the two major fronts, EPLF and ELF and the new offsprings - Popular Liberation Forces/Provisional Revolutionary Committee (PLF/PRC) and Popular Liberation Forces/Central Command (PLP/CC) - signed an agreement in Tunis on March 23, 1981, pledging to enter into fresh moves towards unity.⁶² Certain problems

62. See Colin Legum (ed.) Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents, p. B172.

however remained on the way to achieving this goal.

First was the clear preponderance of the EPLF and the increasing marginalisation of the other groups on the field. Indeed, with its vastly enhanced political and military strength, the EPLF has pushed the national struggle well ahead of ELF and its factions - thus putting itself at a clearly hegemonic position. Besides, the ideological gulf between the fronts also remained a thorny obstacle not only within the Eritrean movement but also between factions of it and their foreign backers. Since it adopted a clear socialist line, the EPLF has unwittingly estranged not only certain factions of the nationalist movement but also the conservative Arab supporters particularly Saudi Arabia.⁶³ A major evidence of this gulf emerged in January 1983 when the Saudi authorities sponsored a unity meeting of the various factions (excluding the EPLF) which produced the Jeddah agreement signed by the ELF-PLF, ELF-RC, and the PLF-RC.⁶⁴ In its reaction, the EPLF roundly repudiated the pact, describing it as "a conspiracy designed to thwart the struggle for the unity of Eritrea".⁶⁵

Predictably, for some obvious reasons, the agreement could not work. First, given its preponderance on the field,

63. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Vol. XXIX, July 1983 p.32238. See, also, James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down, op.cit., pp. 49-50.

64. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, July 1983, p. 32238.

65. Ibid. For a full text of the EPLF's reaction dated 4 February 1984, see Adulis, Vol.1, No.9, March 1985, p.3.

it was clear that any pact that left out EPLF was bound to fail. Secondly, no sooner had they left Jeddah than the signatories clashed among themselves in desperate scramble for bases, positions and leadership of the proposed national council. Although the formation of the Eritrean Unified National Council was announced in Khartoum on June 25, 1985,⁶⁶ nothing concrete followed the move and the Jeddah agreement soon became moribund.

As a result of subsequent efforts, relations among the nationalist groups have since improved and after three years of negotiation, the EPLF and the ELF-CL merged under a unified command in October 1986.⁶⁷ Also, at the second congress of the EPLF in March 1987, at which the merger was consecrated, the other two factions were represented.⁶⁸ ~~This~~ second congress was tagged "unity congress" and the unity theme was reportedly dominant at the assembly. As one foreign observer at the congress concluded, the Eritrean movement appears "well on its own to answering one of the main doubts that sceptics have levelled against its claims and to countering one of the weaknesses manipulated by out-

66. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Vol. XXXII, No.7, 1986, p. 34474.

67. See Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. XXXIII, No.9, September 1987, p. 35368.

68. See 'Briefings', Review of African Political Economy, No.38, April 1987, p. 107.

side forces".⁶⁹

EXTERNAL COMPONENTS IN THE ERITREAN MOVEMENT

In the course of its development, the Eritrean movement, pushed along, first by the ELF, and then more and more by the EPLF, has acquired many international components. These external ingredients are to be found in the various "structures" of the movement.

Structure of Authority:

From the beginning of the liberation struggle under the ELF, its leadership and decision-making machinery were externally based. In fact, the highest decision-making organ, the Supreme Council, was based in Cairo. Also, as noted earlier, all the founding leaders resided abroad, having been exiled. ~~Woldeab~~-Wolde Mariam was, for instance, very active in Cairo from where he made his radio broadcasts. Another veteran, former Secretary-General of the ELF, Osman Saleh Sabbe, lived outside for a considerable ~~period~~ and developed close ties with several Arab leaders. These external contacts and connections later become invaluable as they opened up access to funds and training facilities for the movement. Up till the late 1960s, the ELF was clearly more visible abroad than inside Eritrea. Its leaders moved freely around foreign capitals, particularly in the Arab countries. Apart from its Cairo headquarters which was

69. Lionel Cliffe, "Congress in Eritrea", Review of African Political Economy No.39, September 1987, pp.81-83 at p.81.

later moved to Damascus, Syria, it had offices in Egypt, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Baghdad, Kuwait, Algiers and Paris. In its foreign policies, the movement evinced Pan-Arabic and Islamic orientation and the Eritrean cause was portrayed as a fight for Islam and Arabism.⁷⁰

As a result of the split, the authority structure of the movement became bifurcated. Although quite a number of the new organisation's cadres had external exposures, including training in foreign countries, its leadership was more locally based.⁷¹ It maintained a foreign mission in Beirut from where its external relations were conducted. This foreign bureau was manned by top-level cadres under the leadership of the veteran, Osman Saleh Sabbe, whose diplomatic skill and extensive external connections proved invaluable. Over the last two decades, the decision-making machinery of the EPLF has evolved into a complex and sophisticated structure and its external wing has also developed extensive network of links and representation in Europe, North America, the Middle East and the Scandinavian countries.⁷²

70. On this initial sectarian outlook of the front, see Raman G. Bhardwaj, "The Growing Externalization of the Eritrean Movement", Horn of Africa, Vol.2, No.1, January-March, 1979, pp. 19-27, pp. 19-20.

71. On the social origin of the EPLF, see Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard" op.cit., p.45; also, Yordonos Gebie-Medhin, Eritrea: Background to Revolution, op.cit., p. 60.

72. On the formal structure of the EPLF, see James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down op.cit., pp. 41-44.

Structure of Political Solidarity:

In its early years, the political community or reference group of the Eritrean movement comprised mainly of Arab governments, parties and organisations. This was hardly surprising given its original Moslem social base. Besides, most of the early recruits were predominantly moslem from the western lowlands who were called up in the name of a jihad.⁷³ For sure, this sectarian outlook helped to activate Arab support, but, ironically, it was one of the issues that precipitated the crisis and eventual split within the movement. In a statement after the split, the breakaway faction (later, the EPLF), accused the leadership of the ELF thus:

Instead of promoting our national cause, the leaders of 'Jebha' (ELF) declared that the population is 80 per cent Muslim and the remaining 20 per cent Christian. We also very well know that they rally in the name of Islam rather than in the name of the Eritrean people.⁷⁴

Despite this accusation and its apparently secular outlook, the EPLF still found it expedient to stress and appeal to the identity of interests between Eritreans and the Arabs.

An official organ of the Front, Liberation, had stressed "the organic bonds of solidarity predicated by geography and

73. See Raman G. Bhardwaj, "The Growing Externalization of the Eritrean movement", Op.cit., p. 19; and Gerald Chailand, "The Horn of Africa's Dilemma", Foreign Policy, No.30, Spring, 1978, pp. 117-126.

74. Quoted in David Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard", p.44.

history binding together the fraternal Eritrean and Arab peoples". It further added:

... we wish to resolutely re-affirm that the Eritrean people are the fraternally of the Arab people. They stand firmly on the side of the Arab people in the common struggle against imperialism and zionism as well as on all the other major issues in the region.^{75.}

Apart from the Arabs, the Eritrean movement also had a base within group of radical socialist and the broad anti-colonialist states. Its sectarian outlook notwithstanding, the ELF portrayed the struggle as anti-colonial and anti-imperialist and this may have partly explained the limited support from the Soviet Union and its allies in the 1960s.⁷⁶


With the emergence of the EPLF, the movement became increasingly radicalised. In 1973, its organ, Vanguard declared that the Eritrean struggle is a "national democratic revolution fighting against colonialism, imperialism, and feudalism".⁷⁷

75. Liberation, Vol. No.9, January 1982, p.16.

76. See John F. Campbell, "Rumblings along the Red Sea: The Eritrean Question", Foreign Affairs, Vol.48, No.3, 1970, pp.537-548. According to an Eritrean scholar, Yordanos Gebre-Medhin, "the deplorable conditions in Eritrea combined with the world revolutionary atmosphere made the radicalization of the ELF inevitable". Besides, he added, "some of the fighting forces have been assisted or trained by friendly socialist countries, notably Cuba and the People's Republic of China". See his "Eritrea: Background to Revolution", op.cit., p.60.

77. See Selected Articles from EPLF Publications (1973-1980).

At its congress in 1977, the front expressed solidarity with revolutionary and anti-imperialist struggles in the Horn and throughout the world. It also stressed the importance of building close relations with other liberation movements, revolutionary organisations and socialist countries.⁷⁸ This radical posturing evidently attracted more support for the Eritrean cause from radical states such as Iraq, Syria, Libya as well as Cuba.

However, the division within the movement has also led to a bifurcation and contraction of ^{the} structure of its political community and this was vividly demonstrated in ~~the~~ pattern of support from ^{the} Arabs. For, while  some tilted towards the EPLF, others, notably, North Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia remained on the side of the less radical ELF.⁷⁹ After the 1974 revolution which brought to power a left-leaning and pro-Moscow regime in Addis Ababa, the situation had become diffused as most of the radical Arab and socialist states allied to the Soviet Union shifted their support to the Ethiopian state.⁸⁰

78. See the text of the EPLF's National Democratic Programme of January 31, 1977.

79. On the antecedents to this competing support given by these rival Arab camps, see Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", New Left Review, No.67, May/June 1971, pp.57-67; and, Linda Heiden, "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence", opscit., pp. 13-28.

80. Personal Communication with Eritrean sources.

The withdrawal of Arab support was a particularly agonising development for the nationalist forces. An EPLF spokesman once expressed "deep regrets" that certain Arab regimes have taken a stand with the "fascist Ethiopia regime".⁸¹ In a similar reaction to Ethiopia's fledgling romance with Syria, the Front described Addis Ababa's moves as "part of a vicious campaign to cordon off the Eritrean revolution from its friends and supporters".⁸²

Ethiopia's diplomatic gains have not translated into an absolute loss for the insurgents because the EPLF too has since garnered increased international attention and sympathy from parties and organisations in Europe. Apart from scores of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) other pro-Eritrean sources include the British Labour Party, Green Party of Western Germany, the French as well as Italian Communist Parties.⁸³

Structure of Culture and Communications:

The cultural ties, language and style of warfare, and communications of the movement clearly evince some foreign influences and connections. To begin with, most of its initial fighting cadres had been trained in foreign countries specifically in Sudan, Syria, Egypt and China as well as

81. See interview with Al-Amin Mohammed Said, head of the EPLF's Department of Foreign relations, in Liberation (EPLF) Vol.1, No.1, January-April, 1982, p.9.

82. Dimitsi Hafash (Newsletter of the EPLF), Vol.2, No.12, September 15, 1980, p.1.

83. See Keesings Contemporary Archives, January 4, 1980, p.30015.

by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. After the initial shifita (bandit) mode of struggle of the early 1960s, the style of warfare changed as the movement became exposed to foreign training in Arab countries.⁸⁴ This fact was demonstrated when, towards the end of the decade, it adopted the tactic of hijacking (Ethiopian) airlines - a style for which the radical Arab groups such as the PLO are reputed.

On March 11, 1969, for instance, an Ethiopian Airways Boeing-707 airliner was burnt out in a bomb explosion at Frankfurt airport in West Germany. After the incident, a group which called itself the Arab Liberation Front for Eritrea claimed responsibility and warned that further actions would be taken unless the company terminated its cooperation with the Ethiopian army against the people of Eritrea who were "striving for liberation from Ethiopian rule".⁸⁵ Again on September 13 of the same year same group claimed responsibility (from its base in Damascus) for hijacking an Ethiopian Airways DC-6 airliner on a flight from Addis Ababa to Djibouti and diverted it to Aden. Other similar attempts were made in the year.⁸⁶

With the injection of radical - Marxist-Leninist ideas into the movement, particularly since the emergence of the

84. Eritrean cadres received training at external bases such as Aleppo in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation's camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. For details, see "The Middle-East and Eritrea, 1962-1974" in Haggai Erlich, op.cit., pp.55-70.

85. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, April 19-26, 1969, p.23306.

86. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, October 4-11, 1969, p.33148.

EPLF, the mode of struggle had changed progressively from the sporadic assaults to guerilla tactics and now to a full-scale revolutionary warfare. As Gerard Chailand had observed, this transformation corresponds to the classical pattern of "people's war" as exemplified by the history of revolutionary struggles in places like Cuba, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique to which the leading cadres of the movement had been exposed.⁸⁷

In regard of communications, the EPLF runs a radio station (Voice of the Eritrean Masses) located in the liberated area of Eritrea and it broadcasts in five languages including Arabic. The broadcasts (originally, "Voice of the Eritrean Revolution" from Radio Damascus), cover local and international events and are now received in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and other neighbouring States like Djibouti and Sudan. The information department (of the Front) also publishes and circulates pamphlets, magazines and periodicals both locally and externally from the offices of its Central Bureau of Foreign Relations in Beirut and Paris. As well, there are the Research and Information Centre on Eritrea (RICE) and the Eritrea Information Service (EIS) with offices in several

87. On the stages and transformation of the struggle, see Gerald Chailand, "The Guerilla Struggle", in Davidson et al, pp.51-53. For perspectives on revolutionary struggles, specifically, as regards the concept of "people's war", see, M. Kenner and J. Petras (ed.), Fidel Castro Speaks (Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1969); Eduardo Mondlane (London: Panaf Books, 1978); and, Amical Cabral, Revolution in Guinea (London: Stage 1, 1969).

European and North American cities.⁸⁸ Another form of communication is radio broadcast by exiled Eritrean leaders from foreign stations. This began in the late 1950s from Cairo and later, from Radio Damascus, which broadcast the "Voice of the Eritrean Revolution".

Structure of Resources:

Eritrean leaders have steadily cultivated their external supporters for funds and other forms of material assistance. Bowyer Bell had observed that, in the 1960s:

The exile leaders, who never appeared in Eritrea, would sweep through the radical Arab capitals pleading for funds with revolutionary rhetoric and then swing back through the mosques to seek aid for the persecuted faithful in the name of Islam.⁸⁹

In December 1965, for instance, Osman Saleh publicly called on Arab states to support the Eritrean struggle.⁹⁰ Initially, these entreaties paid off handsomely. The ELF secured a base of operation in Sudan - for training, supplies and as sanctuary. In addition, it received funds and material assistance from Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and the socialist states. When Colonel Qaddafi came to power in 1969, Libya became a key backer of the Eritrean cause and supplied arms and ammunition to the movement. Also, with the

88. The regular publications of these agencies include Adulis, Liberation, Eritrea Information among others.

89. J. Bowyer Bell, "Endemic Insurgency and International Order: The Eritrean Experience", ORBIS, Vol.18, No.2, Summer 1974, pp. 427-50, at p. 436.

90. Ibid., p. 434.

victory of the National Liberation Front of South Yemen that same year, Aden became an important staging area for getting men and material across the Red Sea into Eritrea.⁹¹

As a result of developments in the Middle-East and within the Eritrean camp itself, some of these sources of assistance tended to dry up thereby forcing the movement, particularly the EPLF, to rely more and more on its own resources and those captured from the Ethiopian camp.⁹² Notwithstanding, it still maintains its foreign offices for diplomatic and propaganda activities.

Ethiopian Responses to the Eritrean Question:

In the bid to contain the Eritrean struggle, successive Ethiopian regimes have adopted two basic stratagems; first, to militarily pacify the movement, and, second, to isolate it internationally. Ultimately, the objective of this twin military and diplomatic strategy is to weaken and erode external support for the liberation struggle.

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91. See Tekie Fessehazion, "The International Dimensions of the Eritrean Question", op.cit., p.20.
92. For instance, Saudi Arabia had cut off assistance to the ELF since 1967 as a result of the presence of Christians in the movement. That same year, the Six-Day War and the defeat of Egypt dampened the enthusiasm of Cairo, in particular, for the Eritrean cause. See Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", p. 65.

When the armed struggle began in obscurity in the early 1960s, the imperial regime chose to ignore the EDF insurgency and dismissed it as traditional shifita (bandit) campaign of the bush.⁹³ The intention then was not to overreact or acknowledge the existence of any opposition to imperial rule. However, as the EDF kept up the pressure, Addis Ababa increasingly mounted armed reprisals, including air strikes, coming to a head in 1967 when it launched a sweeping offensive which led to massive devastation and exodus of Eritrean refugees to Sudan. This offensive was accompanied by burning of villages, persecution of civilians, relentless and extensive forays into the western lowland base of the insurgency. An account of this operation has been given by an Israeli ex-adviser to the Ethiopian army:

The 2nd Division is very efficient in killing innocent people. They are alienating the Eritreans and deepening the hatred that already exists. Their commander took his senior aides to a spot near the Sudanese border and ordered them: 'From here to the north - clean the area'. Many innocent people were massacred and nothing of substance was achieved. There is simply no way the Ethiopian army will ever win the struggle over Eritrea by pursuing this line.⁹⁴

It is pertinent to remark here that Ethiopia was assisted in this counter-insurgency offensive by Israeli advisers and

93. See Erlich, op.cit., p. 35, and Bell, op.cit., p.433.

94. Quoted in Erlich, p. 58. See, as well, the observations of Dawit, Red Tears, especially pp. 81-82/

arms supplied by the United States.⁹⁵

Apart from the military option, the Selassie regime also sought to isolate the Eritrean movement externally. To this end, it exploited its membership and standing in the international community to deny the Eritreans any possible forum for presenting their case.⁹⁶ In addition, Addis Ababa strove to erode the legitimacy and respectability of the Eritreans by denigrating them as mere tools in the hands of some foreign enemies. In February 1957, the Emperor accused Egypt of stirring unrest among the Moslem population of Eritrea with the aim of dismembering Ethiopia. Earlier in 1956, he had had the Egyptian military attache in Addis Ababa, Lieutenant-Colonel Hilmy, recalled on the allegation that he (Hilmy) had tried to recruit Ethiopian moslems for the Egyptian army.⁹⁷ Similar accusations were levied against Syria, Sudan and other Arab countries. In a speech at Asmara in 1967, the Ethiopian monarch charged that:

The outlaws whom we are fighting are unfortunate people, who receive help from abroad in order to spread subversion among their brothers but Ethiopia possesses the necessary means to defend her integrity.⁹⁸

99. Ibid., p.57. See, also, Abel Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66", African Affairs, vol.9, No.2, August 1971, pp. 165-187, at p. 175.

96. See Tekie Fessehazion, op.cit., p.20.

97. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, March 2-9, 1957, p.15410.

98. Ibid., July 22-29, 1967, p. 22166.

Still, in order to counteract the Eritreans' external support base, the imperial régime had mounted spirited diplomatic initiatives. Before abrogating the federation, the Emperor embarked on a two-month diplomatic offensive in 1959 which took him to Sudan, Egypt, USSR, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France, Portugal and Yugoslavia. His visit to Egypt, the first since 1924, was most significant because Cairo then was host to prominent Eritrean leaders and at the end of talks with President Nasser, the communique stated that both sides had agreed on steps to strengthen diplomatic relations.⁹⁹

Throughout his tenure, the Emperor was very active diplomatically with the main objective of neutralising or winning over the backers of the Eritrean movement. In October 1966, he made a tour of some Arab countries including Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan and the United Arab Emirate, obviously to wean them away from supporting the insurgency. A scheduled trip to Iraq was, however, cancelled.¹⁰⁰

Nowhere was the Ethiopian campaign more successful than within the Organisation of African Unity. At its inception in 1963, the Emperor was among those conservative forces who ensured in the O.A.U.'s charter, the clause sanctifying

99, Ibid., September 12-19, 1959, p. 17003.

100. Ibid., July 22-29, 1967, p. 22166. Commenting on the Selassie's diplomatic offensives, Frank Boyce had noted that the Emperor travelled "abroad more than any other chief of state". See Frank Boyce, "The Internationalizing of Internal War: Ethiopia, the Arabs and the Case of Eritrea", Journal of International and Comparative Studies, vol.5,

existing frontiers. The immediate consequence of this legal order was to deny the Eritrean cause any legitimacy.¹⁰¹ It was therefore not surprising that the organisation refused to recognise the ELF as a liberation movement while its Arab-African members became less enthusiastic in their support for the struggle.¹⁰²

Two major factors were responsible for Ethiopia's success in this regard. First was the Emperor's forte at personal diplomacy and his prestige as one of the continent's most astute statesmen which he put to good use.¹⁰³ Secondly, and closely related to the point above, was Addis Ababa's stature as a regional diplomatic centre. Since the late 1950s the Ethiopian capital has emerged as the major centre of Pan-Africanism. What is more, both the OAU and the United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa are located in the city. Being the astute diplomat that he was, Emperor Haile Selassie capitalised on this favourable conjuncture to strike initiatives which often ended up undercutting the external base of the Eritreans. In 1967, for instance, he played a central role in settling the long-standing dispute between the Sudanese government and the Anya-Nya insurgents in the south of the country. In return, Sudan not only expressed

101. See Z. Cervenka, The Unfinished Quest for Unity (New York: Africana, 1977); and, Immanuel Wallerstein, Africa: The Politics of Unity (New York: Vintage, 1967).

102. See Boyce, "The Internationalizing of Internal War".

103. See John H. Spencer, "Haile Selassie: Triumph and Tragedy" ORBIS, Vol.18, No.4, Winter, 1975, pp. 1129-40.

its gratitude, but, and more importantly, closed ELF bases located in the country.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, and at every opportune occasion, the Emperor had pulled similar diplomatic coup. Commenting on this diplomatic stratagem, Bell had noted that:

The policy of isolation as manipulated from Addis Ababa revealed the Emperor at his most effective, formed as it was by a combination of diplomatic initiatives, proxy revolution, veiled threats, the exploitation of his own image, others' fears, and shifts in the international climate. Ethiopia repeatedly closed off the ELF, not only in the forums of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity, but also along the wild borders of the Sudan and across the Red Sea. Simultaneously, wherever possible, Ethiopia simply denied the existence of the ELF insurgency and rarely indicated publicly that allied help, i.e., American or Israeli, would be welcome.¹⁰⁵

Despite the Emperor's apparent success at isolating the insurgents internationally, the Eritrean problem remained as resilient as ever. It was, in fact, one of the major factors that brought about the downfall of the imperial regime in 1974. It was also the first major and thorny crisis that confronted the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) which took over power from the ancient regime. In the aftermath of Selassie's ouster and the collapse of central authority in Addis Ababa, the Eritrean struggle assumed an insuperable dimension as it escalated into a full-scale war. By the middle of 1977, the liberation fronts had captured about 90

104. See Negussay Ayele, "The Foreign Policy of Ethiopia", in Olajide Aluko (ed.), The Foreign Policies of African States (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p.64.

105. Bell, op.cit. p. 116

per cent of Eritrean territory, gaining, in the process, a clear military advantage over a demoralised Ethiopian army.¹⁰⁶

Initially, the PMAC's (otherwise known as the Dergue) position appeared both conciliatory and confusing, reflecting, as it were, the seething within the junta. Its first Chairman, General Andom, an Eritrean, favoured a negotiated solution and talked about "understanding, cooperation and unity".¹⁰⁷ He was however killed in the first of a series of blood-letting within the ruling body. Mengistu's rise to power was in fact not unconnected with his hard-line position on the Eritrean question. As Tom Farer poignantly puts it, Mengistu "climbed to his present position over the bodies of the competitors who tended to die as soon as they proposed a negotiated settlement with the Eritreans".¹⁰⁸ Thus, with Mengistu firmly in the saddle, the Dergue's position became increasingly clearer and stiffer.

In April 1976, it issued the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme which enshrined, in principle, the equality

106. At its congress in Syria in 1974, the ELF had decided on an "escalation of the revolution" and the general turmoil that attended the Ethiopian revolution offered the liberation fronts a most favourable conjuncture. See Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.II, No.2, 1974, p.3033.
107. See David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1978) pp. 155-7.
108. Tom J. Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm, p.160.

of nationalities and the right of each one to "self-determination" within the context of the unity of Ethiopia.

This was soon followed by the Nine-Point Peace Plan on Eritrea. Obviously, the Dergue's commitment to Ethiopian "unity" had become an irreducible minimum thus posing a stark choice for Eritreans: "Unity or Death".¹⁰⁹ In concrete terms, what the Dergue offered was regional autonomy but this fell short of the demands of the Eritreans.

Simultaneously as the "Peace Plan" was being espoused, the Mengistu regime was also planning a military offensive. It first organised and despatched a disastrous (peasants' march' and later a "peoples' militia", to confront and wipe out the Eritrean insurgents.¹¹⁰ From then on, the Dergue reverted back fully to the traditional imperial tactics.

First, the military solution in form of large-scale armed reprisals against Eritrean positions became an annual ritual, coming to a head in 1982 with the brutal "Operation Red Star", offensives (which was) officially described as a "multi-purpose revolutionary campaign to wipe out secessionist bandits... in the Eritrean region!"¹¹¹

109. Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1977), p.18.

110. See Patric Gilkes, "Centralism and the Ethiopian PMAC", in I.M. Lewis, Nationalism and Self D termination in the Horn of Africa, pp. 197-211.

11. A.C.R., 1982/83, p. B146. For details on the operation, see Roy Pateman, "Eritrea Under the Dergue, Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol.1, No.2, Winter, 1987, pp. 1-9.

Alongside this militarist posture, it also continued with the imperial-style diplomatic offensive aimed at further isolating the Eritrean movement. This it did by frequently lampooning "international imperialism" and "neighbouring reactionary forces" for supporting "secessionist bandits in Eritrea".¹¹² In February 1977, Mengistu accused Saudi Arabia and others of planning a big plot to destroy the revolution and claimed that the Eritrean problem would have been resolved but for the "uninterrupted support" which the insurgents were getting from the "reactionary rulers of the Sudan and others in the Red Sea region".¹¹³

Going further, he declared:

In our region, mother Ethiopia does not have any revolutionary friend except the PDRY. The broad masses of Ethiopia should constantly ponder this fact!¹¹⁴

made

More concretely, the Dergue, spirited diplomatic moves to forestall further external support for the insurgents and, at the same time, advertise its own revolutionary credentials.¹¹⁵ In the bid to persuade the Warsaw Pact and radical Arab countries, the new regime tried to rationalise its position on the national

112. See A.C.R., 1984/85, p. B233 and B237. See, also, Africa Diary, August 20-26, 1978, p.9139.

113. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, July 1, 1977, p.28422.


114. A.C.R., 1976/77, p. B207.

115. See Olusola Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Since the 1974 Revolution", Horn of Africa, Vol.3, No.4, 1980/81, pp. 3-12; and Tekie Fessehazion, "The International Dimensions of the Eritrean Question".

question along ideological lines, contending that the overthrow of Emperor Selassie's imperial regime had obviated the justification for the Eritrean struggle.

As Mengistu exhorted:

Revolutionaries who stand for similar aims in one country do not struggle for mutual destruction by splintering, confronting one another and rivalry. Therefore, at this juncture in time when all the working people are engaged in a revolutionary movement, to opt for secession in the name of a nationality can be nothing other than to shun the revolution and to impede the workers from achieving their attainment of true liberty. In the present Ethiopian situation, the secessionist stand does not represent the aspirations of the workers of any nationality...116

Based on this ground, the Dergue repeatedly pledged "to ensure uniform rights in line with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism..."¹¹⁷ At the same time, it expressly solicited the support of states with similar outlook for its efforts at building socialism and maintaining the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. In June 1978,  the Dergue's chairman, Mengistu, canvassed thus:

We believe that socialist democratic and progressive forces whose main aim is to struggle for the equality of the broad masses and the right of oppressed people, have the revolutionary duty of siding with us in the struggle to safeguard the unity and revolution of Ethiopia.¹¹⁸

As a follow-up to these entreaties, Ethiopian officials were dispatched to African, Arab and European countries to

116. Africa Contemporary Record, (A.C.R.) 1984/85, p.B234.

117. A.C.R., 1982/83, p. B134.

118. Keesing's, December 15, 1978, p. 29357. The emphasis is

present the Ethiopian situation in a package designed to fit the ideological predilections of the countries they visited. Apart from Mengistu's personal visit, Colonel Mengistu himself went to Moscow in May 1977 to solicit for arms and support, other delegates toured the Eastern European countries like East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. At every stop, the missions repeated Addis Ababa's stance that since the imperial regime was overthrown by a socialist regime, the Eritrean struggle was no longer justifiable.¹¹⁹

In the wake of the Ogaden war of 1977, the Soviet Union jettisoned its old-time ally, Somalia, and switched its support fully behind the Addis Ababa regime. With the airlift of massive arms as well as advisers from the USSR, Cuba and the Warsaw Pact countries, Ethiopia scored a major diplomatic victory culminating in a 20-year Ethio-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.¹²⁰ Under this treaty, both countries agreed to develop and deepen relations of "unbreakable friendship, and comprehensive cooperation in the economic, trade, scientific, technical, cultural and other fields".¹²¹

Once the Treaty with the Soviet Union was sealed, the support of the Warsaw Pact countries and other Soviet

119. A.C.R. 1975/76 B205.

120. See Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.14, No.18, September 1977, p. 4527; and Africa Diary, Vol.20, No.12, March 1980, p. 9929.

121. For more details, see Olusola Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Since the 1974 Revolution", p.11.

allies was virtually automatic.¹²² In the process, the Eritreans became increasingly isolated from their erstwhile backers, in particular, those in the radical Arab camp such as Libya and South Yemen.¹²³ In fact, Ethiopia, South Yemen and Libya signed a tripartite treaty in August 1981 formalising Addis Ababa's alliance with, and denying the Eritreans support of, two of the most radical Arab states.¹²⁴ Apart from this in-road into the radical Arab camp, the Mengistu regime has also been courting the moderate countries such as Egypt. In April 1987, Chairman Mengistu paid a four-day visit to Cairo, the first by an Ethiopian leader since the 1974 revolution, and both countries expressed the determination to strengthen bilateral relations and their desire for peace and stability in the region based on OAU's position on the sovereignty of all states.¹²⁵

Within its immediate environ, Addis Ababa has also accorded high priority to its relations with the neighbouring countries with a view to ensuring, at least, that they are not used as staging areas by the Eritrean liberation forces. To this end, it has continuously tried to court Kenya, Sudan and Somalia, and, soon after it came to power, the Dergue dispatched high level delegations to these countries. With

122. Indeed, Ethiopia had, in rapid succession, signed the familiar friendship treaties with a number of Eastern European states. See Keesings, 1982, p. 37687.

123. Ibid.

124. ATC.R., 1985/86, p.B244.

125. Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.24, No.4, May 15, 1987.

Kenya, these overtures paid off very well leading to a 10-year treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1979. Under this treaty, both countries reaffirmed their interest and cooperation in "keeping with the principles of inviolability of territorial integrity and sacredness of borders and non-interference^D in the internal affairs of others".¹²⁶ With the other two neighbours, however, Ethiopia has not succeeded in building any lasting bridge as its relations with them frequently oscillated between fleeting cordiality and prolonged hostility coming to a head over the Ogaden war with Somalia in 1977.¹²⁷

In the case of Mogadishu and Khartoum, the Mengistu regime has resorted to a two-pronged strategy. First, it supports forces opposed to these regimes as a counter to their assistance to the Eritreans. In Sudan, it supports the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) of Joseph Garang, while in Somalia, it props the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the Democratic Front for the Salvation of Somalia (DFSS).¹²⁸ At the same time, it

126. Keesing's, March 20, 1979, p. 29528.

127. See Olusola Ojo, op.cit., pp. 4-7.

128. See Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.23, No.1, February 15, 1986, p. 79245; and, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Yearbook 1987: World Armaments and Disarmament (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 315.

pursues the diplomatic option of negotiating with both governments periodically to reach mutual agreements on ending support for insurgents in each other's territory. For example, following an exchange of visits by Mengistu and Numeiry in 1980, an agreement was reached on May 30, 1982 in Khartoum in which they pledged to "remove all obstructions to good relations between the two countries and particularly to stop all facilities used by secessionist elements which work for destabilization" and to "expel groups and individuals working to inflict damage on the other neighbouring states in whatever form". Predictably, however, relations between the two soon deteriorated with both sides trading the usual accusations.¹²⁹

In the meantime, the Ethiopian government again offered to mediate between Khartoum and SPLA - a move clearly not unrelated to the Eritrean problem. It has also stepped up efforts at normalising relations with Somalia in the hope that a flaw in relations with Mogadishu will mitigate the pressures from the Ogaden front and allow it (Addis Ababa) concentrate all resources on containing the Eritrean problem. O

129. In 1983, Sudan cut diplomatic relations with Addis Ababa over the latter's support for the SPLA and despite the subsequent agreement by both sides to improve relations, Khartoum again recalled its ambassador to Ethiopia in 1986 in the heat of renewed tension between the two. See Africa Research Bulletin, 15 February 1985, pp.7513-7. and 11 December 1986, p. 2891.

January 18, 1986, the Somali leader, Siad Barre and Colonel Mengistu met for the first time since 1977 in Djibouti and agreed to resolve their differences.¹³⁰ This move led to an agreement between both countries in April 1988.

Internally, the incumbent regime, like its imperial predecessor, has made very little, if any, effort to solve the real problem by other means despite the increasing losses to the Eritrean forces. Although some attempts at negotiations were made in Rome in 1984 and 1985, and in Khartoum in 1989, nothing concrete was achieved as the preparatory talks were deadlocked.¹³¹

When in 1987 Ethiopia was declared a socialist republic, the new constitution hardly appeased the nationalist forces. Like the defunct imperial constitution, it insisted that the country remained a "unitary state" and emphasised its "inviolability and territorial integrity". In line with the familiar official policy, it conceded that Eritrea, and some nationalities in Tigre, Assab, Ogaden and Dire Dawa would become autonomous regions.¹³² Even then, this concession was left to the discretion of the Ethiopian Shengo (Assembly) which has the power to decide the boundaries, status, and degree of autonomy to be granted to each of the

130. Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.23, No.1, 15 February 1986, pp. 7924-5.

131. See Africa Contemporary Record, 1985/86 p.B297, Keessing's, Vol.XXXII, No.7, 1986, p.34474, and Africa Events (London), May 1989, p.16.

132. See the Constitution of the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1987.

selected regions. Predictably, the Eritrean forces promptly rejected the move and as the EPLF argued, the Ethiopian assembly had "no right to determine the right of self-determination of the Eritrean people or to redraw the international frontiers of Eritrea",¹³³

The latest initiative by Addis Ababa was the plan put forward in 1989 to administratively divide Eritrea into two autonomous regions - one, the North, for Muslims and the other, South, for Christians. The partition has since been endorsed by the Council of State ostensibly to satisfy "demands" by the local populace.¹³⁴ Clearly, the objective of the move was to divide Eritreans along religious lines with a view to eroding the support base of the EPLF. It is therefore not surprising that the Front promptly rejected the plan.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, the war continues and yet, a military solution seems an increasingly remote possibility.

133. Ibid., p. 8625B

134. See the "Petition for Autonomous Status of Lowland Areas of Eritrea" circulated by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1989.

135. See Africa Events, (London) May 1989, p.16.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXTERNAL ACTORS AND THE ERITREAN PROBLEM: THE AFRO-ARAB NEXUS

The African Actors:

Within the continent, four major factors account for and constrain African states' attitude to, and involvement in, the Eritrean conflict. One is the behavioural norms enshrined in the O.A.U.'s charter particularly the principle of inviolability of frontiers inherited from the colonial past.¹ A corollary of this firm insistence on the preservation of territorial status quo is the manifest tendency towards a conservative anti-colonial interpretation of self-determination as applying only to peoples under external, that is, European domination.² Secondly, due to the arbitrary balkanisation of the peoples of Africa during the colonial scramble, there exists all over the region deep-seated transnational ethno-linguistic and religious loyalties which serve as bases for loyalties that cut across national frontiers. Thirdly, because of the resilient

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1. See Articles 2 and 3 of the OAU's Charter.
 2. On the status quo orientation of the organisation, see Amadu Sesay, "The OAU and Continental Order" in Timothy M. Shaw and 'Sola Ojo (ed.), Africa and the International Political System (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 168-225.

nature of national contradictions within the region, almost every other state is a potential theatre of nationality conflicts arising, largely, from the national question. And, because of their fragile political and economic systems, most states have a vested interest in regional order and stable norms of state-behaviour.³ Finally, the Eritrean war, like every other, has its attendant refugee problem which creates heavy burdens and security risks for neighbours and invariably draws them into the disputes in one way or the other.

SUDAN

Of all Ethiopia's neighbours, Sudan is the most affected by the Eritrean conflict. For this reason alone, it is perhaps natural that it be concerned by, and involved in, the conflict. In the first place, the Eritrean forces have a ready-made support base in the Beni Amer people whose lands straddle the Eritrean-Sudanese people.

3. For an elaboration of this theme, see Mohammed Ayoob, "The Third World in the System of States: Acute Schizophrenia or Growing Pains", International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 1, March 1989, pp. 67-79.

Secondly, irrespective of religious and cultural ties, geography has made it impossible for the Eritrean movements to operate without the active support, or, at least, tacit acquiescence of Khartoum for communication and transit facilities. Both the ELF⁴ and the EPLF have benefitted from and still rely on Khartoum's good-will for passage of supplies through its eastern border to the fighters in the field. Thirdly, since the outbreak of armed fighting, Sudan has been host to endless hordes of refugees fleeing from war zones. According to UNHCR, there were over 50,000 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan in 1975.⁵ And as the Eritrean war intensified, the estimate had shot up to about 700,000, now including those fleeing from the equally war-ravaged Tigre province.⁶ Obviously, no state would feel comfortable with this multitude of uninvited guests and Khartoum has often invoked this

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4. In the early 1960s, the ELF operated freely from its base in Kasala, along the Eritrean-Sudanese border. See Africa Contemporary Record, 1968/69, p. B148.
 5. Africa Research Bulletin, March 1976, p. 3954-55.
 6. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, July 1985, p. 33705.

discomfort to justify its concern with the Eritrean conflict.

During the last days of the Ethiopian-Eritrean federation, Sudan became a haven of exile for Eritrean leaders and, in the early years of the ELF, Khartoum was host to its Supreme Council (the political leadership) while the Revolutionary (military) Command was based in the frontier town of Kasala. Sudanese support for the insurgents has frequently strained Ethio-Sudanese relations and in the bid to undercut the insurgents, Addis-Ababa has constantly sought friendly relations with Khartoum.

Following the outbreak of rebellion in its Southern region in 1963, Sudan itself became quite vulnerable to external pressures and this presented Ethiopia with a valuable bargaining card in its quest for a diplomatic accord with the Khartoum.⁷ No wonder then that late in 1963, the Sudanese government extradited 13 Eritrean fighters who were later executed in Addis Ababa.⁸ This

7. See A.C.R., 1972/73 p. B77; Godfrey Morrison, The Southern Sudan and Eritrea: Aspects of Wider African Problems (London: Minority Rights Group, 1971).

8. Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 65.

move culminated, the following year, in an extradition pact between the two countries but the rapprochement was, however, aborted sequel to the overthrow of General Ibrahim Abud by a regime with strong leftist and Islamic fundamentalist influence as well as an express pro-Eritrean sympathy.⁹

In February 1967 when Emperor Selassie visited Sudan, he was greeted by hostile demonstrations while some figures in the Constituent Assembly, notably members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the National Union Party, boycotted the reception ceremonies.¹⁰ Although both sides reaffirmed the imperative of friendly relations, the succeeding government of former President Nimeiry openly advocated the Eritrean cause and extended support to the ELF.¹¹ An indication of Khartoum's support was the opening of crucial supply lines (through Sudan), thus facilitating the transfer of arms and other assistance

9. Ibid.

10. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, June 24-July 1, 1967, p. 22104.

11. See Africa Contemporary Record, 1968/69 p. B103, and 1969/70 p. B58.

from the movement's foreign backers such as Iraq, Libya and the PLO. Nimeiry's support for the insurrection soon provoked a counter-action by Addis Ababa in form of renewed support for the Anya Nya rebellion in Southern Sudan with a view to forcing Khartoum back to the diplomatic table.¹² This strategy proved effective and in March 1971 both sides entered into a treaty prohibiting subversive activity. Sudan terminated assistance to the ELF and when the Eritreans were implicated in the abortive coup against the Nimeiry regime in July 1971, the movement was kept under very strict watch and its activities on Sudanese soil became further circumscribed.

Sequel to Emperor Selassie's role in ending the Anya Nya rebellion in 1971, Ethio-Sudanese relations improved remarkably. An indication of this new rapport was given between November 1971 and January 1972 when both

12. See A.C.R., 1971/72 p. B77.

12. A.C.R., 1972/73, p. B. 85.

leaders exchanged visits and signed a treaty on 28 February 1972.¹³ Under this pact, both sides agreed to end assistance to opposition movement against each other and in the aftermath, President Nimeiry cut off assistance to the Eritreans and sealed their offices along the Eritrean-Sudanese border.¹⁴ A further evidence of this thaw was the offer by Nimeiry to mediate between Ethiopia and the Eritreans but no concrete move was ever made.

After the Ethiopia revolution, however, relations between the two states rapidly deteriorated especially with the killing of the first Chairman of the PMAC, General Aman Andom - a Sudanese-educated Eritrean whose conciliatory stance on the Eritrean question Nimeiry had supported. Thus, soon after Andom's death when

13. Ibid. See also A.C.R., 1971/72, pp. B118-9.

14. A.C.R. 1973/74 p. B155. For a general overview of Ethiopia-Sudanese relations after the 1972 agreement, see, Richard P. Stevens, "The 1972 Addis Ababa agreement and Sudan's Afrd-Arab Policy", Journal of Modern African Studies, 14(2) 1976 pp. 247-274, especially, pp. 258-61.

hostilities resumed between the Eritrean fronts and Ethiopian forces, Sudan again renewed assistance to insurgents.¹⁵ Again, Addis Ababa swiftly made moves to stop Sudanese support for the Eritreans.

To this end, it sent a diplomatic mission led by its Minister of Information, Michael Imru, to Khartoum to patch-up difference with the Sudanese authorities. In response, President Nimeiry called for a ceasefire and peace talks on the Eritrean war. He also dispatched a delegation to Ethiopia with a view to initiating a peace process. Although the hostilities temporarily abated, no significant result came from the peace initiatives. Not deterred, the Addis Ababa regime continued to press Khartoum to encourage the Eritreans to enter into peace talks.¹⁶

In April 1976, for example, Ato Kilfe Wodajo, then Ethiopia's Foreign Minister visited Sudan and pleaded

15. See Olusola Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Since the 1974 Revolution" in Horn of Africa, 3(4) 1980/81, pp. 3-12 at p. 5.

16. See A.C.R. 1975/76 p. B.198.

with Nimeiry to resume his mediatory role. This entreaty appeared to have gone down well with Nimeiry for, when the Dergue proclaimed the Nine-Point Peace Plan for Eritrea in May 1976, he urged the Eritreans to accept it and offered to mediate. And, in appreciation of this gesture, the Ethiopian government sent a delegation led by Major Merhanu Baye to Sudan with a special message for President Nimeiry, expressing gratitude for his intercession.¹⁷ As would be expected, this camaraderie was shortlived. The resilient factor in the frequent breakdown in relations has been the Eritrean problem. Each time the insurgency flares up, Khartoum gets drawn into the war not only because of its connections with the insurgents, but, also because of the attendant refugee burden it shoulders. Another compounding factor was the attempted coup against the Sudanese regime in July 1976 over which the Libyan and Ethiopian governments were implicated.¹⁸ Indeed, by the end of the year, relations

17. A.C.R., 1975/76 p. B.208.

18. Ibid.

between Addis Ababa and Khartoum had become clearly strained. An indication of this came on 27 December 1976 when Nimeiry pointedly accused the Dergue of aiding Sudanese dissidents who were supposedly being trained in camps in Ethiopia built with Libyan assistance.¹⁹

Moreover, the violent resolution of the ideological rivalry within the Dergue in favour of the pro-Moscow faction also contributed to the smouldering hostility between Khartoum. Since the abortive coup against Nimeiry in 1971 in which local communists and the Soviet Union were implicated, the Sudanese leader had become obsessively fearful of, and antagonistic to, the Kremlin.²⁰ Against this background then, the pro-Soviet change in Addis Ababa could only further heighten Nimeiry's apprehension of the spectre of a Soviet-backed subversion from next door. As the tension mounted, President Nimeiry withdrew his

19. Ibid.

20. Since the attempted coup in 1971, President Nimeiry had steadily attacked the Soviet Union and its allies as the bloc of 'new imperialism'. See for instance his statement on the Third Anniversary of the May Revolution in 1972 in A.C.R., 1972/73 p. C101. See, also, Oye Ogunbadejo, "Soviet Policies in Africa" African Affairs, Vol. 79, No. 316, July 1980, pp. 297-325.

ambassador to Addis Ababa in January 1977 and threatened to utilise the thousands of Eritrean refugees in his country to cause unrest in Ethiopia and "create troubles for the criminal Ethiopian regime."²¹ Worse still, he embarked on an open and aggressive advocacy of the Eritrean cause urging the UN to recognise "the just struggle of the oppressed Eritreans" who, in his words, were "going from strength to strength capturing Eritrean towns in the fight for the liberation of their country from a foreign invader".²²

At its Libreville summit in 1977, the OAU set up a commission to mediate in the Ethio-Sudanese dispute. Despite the commission's efforts, the Eritrean question dogged the conciliatory move throughout. Soon after the peace effort were wound up in Freetown in February 1979, the relationship between them reverted to the status quo ante - a cyclical pattern in which both

21. A.C.R., 1975/76 p. B.208.

22. Haggai Brlich The Struggle Over Eritrea p. 7.

furtive assistance to each other's opponent, exchange mutual accusations and cut off relations only to enter into a new process of rapprochement.²³ For instance, although both had reached an accord in 1982, relations between them soon deteriorated and were eventually severed. In the past, such rupture in relations had always been to the advantage of the Eritreans who could then cash in on more Sudanese diplomatic and material largesse. This time around, Sudan had been deterred from supporting the Eritrean movement as it was wont to. In fact, it has now become more disposed to entering into deals with Addis Ababa due to the resurgence of the Southern Sudanese problem in the form of a full-scale insurgency being waged by the SPLA which has its main external base in Ethiopia.²⁴ Once again, the Ethiopia regime has found (in the SPLA) a

23. Olusola Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy Since the 1974 Revolution", p. 6.

24. See Maesing's Contemporary Archives, September 10, 1982, pp. 31686-7.

valuable bargaining issue to be traded against Sudanese support for the Eritrean forces.

After the fall of President Nimeiry, both sides agreed to end support for each other's opposition forces and in July 1985, the Sudanese Foreign Minister stated that his government had cut off aid to the Eritrean movement. Khartoum actually went ahead to ask the fronts to leave Sudan, stating that nationalist aspirations should take into consideration a united Ethiopia.²⁵ However, this exhortation was apparently a diplomatic gimmick which was not intended to lead to any real change. As Makinda observed, "old habits die hard; despite these public pledges, both states appear still to be aiding the other's guerrillas".²⁶ Indeed,

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25. A.C.R., 1985/86 p. B.299. In a speech quoted by an Arab Newspaper in 2 February 1986, the then Sudanese Foreign Minister said that "Sudan recognises the present regime in Ethiopia and has never recognised Eritrea as an independent and separate thing. We reject any movement leading to the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia. The Eritrean question is an internal matter in Ethiopia, just as the question of the South is an internal matter in Sudan". Quoted in Eritrea Information 8(3) 1986 p. 10.
26. See Samuel Makinda, "Sudan: Old Wine in New Bottles", ORBIS 31(2), 1987 pp. 217-228 at p. 224.

relations between them soon became icy leading to a total rupture late in 1986. As usual, both sides have subsequently warmed up to each other and Khartoum's enthusiasm for the Eritrean cause has been tempered by factors not unconnected with the increased tempo of the insurgency in its southern region.²⁷ Besides, Sudan has adopted a mediatory role playing host to series of peace talks between the Ethiopian government and some factions of the Eritrean movement. Although the Sudanese initiative has become redundant, Khartoum cannot easily wash its hand off the Eritrean problem for, in the interim, it remains a helpless host to the insurgents as well as thousands of refugees.²⁸

SOMALIA

In practical terms, Somalia's involvement in the conflict has been rather insignificant. Although the ELF

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27. On the resurgence of the Southern Sudanese problem and Ethiopia connection with the SPLA, see A.C.R., 1985/86, pp. C32-38; Africa Research Bulletin, 15 October, 1986, p. 8222 and 15 August 1985, p. 7678. Also, Marina Ottaway, "Post-Nimeiry Sudan: One Year on", Third World Quarterly, 9(3), July 1987, pp. 891-905.
28. On Sudan's mediatory effort, see Africa Events (London), May 1989, p. 16, and New African (London), July 1989, p. 13.

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opened an office in the capital, Mogadishu, in June 1963, Somali role in the Eritrean struggle was limited to the active verbal support it gave to the movement.²⁹ The Somali radio also gave coverage to the front's activities and broadcast its propaganda materials. Apart from the frequent denunciation of the Ethiopian regime, Mogadishu generally maintained a low posture over the Eritrean question. Two major factors were responsible for this cautious stance on the conflict.

One was the ever-present spectre and apprehension of Ethiopia's military might. In 1964, for a border skirmish ended in a telling military defeat in the hands of the Ethiopian forces. After that incident, the two countries signed an agreement in October 1965 to end hostilities and support for dissidents within each other's territory.³⁰ For a long time afterwards, Eritrea virtually ceased to feature in the Somali mass media.

Second, and most important, is the commitments of

29. A.C.R., 1971/72, p. B119.

30. See Robert E. Gorelick, "Pan Somalia-ism Vs. Territorial Integrity", Horn of Africa, 3(4), 1981, pp. 31-35, at p. 32.

successive regimes in Mogadishu to the policy of "Greater Somalia", that is, the unification of all Somali peoples separated from their kith and kin as a result of the arbitrary demarcation of borders by the colonial masters. Since its independence in July 1960, this idea of "Pan-Somali-ism" has been an overriding objective and a major factor in Somalia's relations with Addis Ababa as well as Kenya. Through the furtive assistance it gave to the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) - fighting to liberate the Somali-inhabited region of Ogaden from Ethiopian rule-Somalia's irredentism was a constant source of friction in the sub-region coming to a head in a full-scale war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden in 1977.³¹

Against this overarching commitment, the Eritrean issue could hardly excite the enthusiasm of Mogadishu.

31. Ibid. See, also, J. Drysdale, The Somali Dispute (New York: Praeger, 1964), and Saadia Touval, Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa (Cambridge, Ma: Havard University Press, 1963), and W. Michael Reisman, "Somali Self-Determination in the Horn: Legal Perspectives and Implications for Social and Political Engineering" in I. M. Lewis (ed), Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa, pp. 151-173.

However, following the crushing defeat by the Soviet-backed Ethiopian army in the Ogaden war, the Barre regime resumed its hostile propaganda against Addis Ababa. In a statement from Mogadishu on 4 February 1982, it accused Ethiopia and its foreign backers of pursuing a "genocide campaign to exterminate 3.5m. Eritreans".³² Also, at a subsequent press conference, the Somali Foreign Affairs Minister Challe Abdurahman Barre expressed full support to those struggling for their freedom and self-determination. Of recent, however, Ethiopia has exploited Barre's increasingly restive opposition as a counter to Mogadishu's support for the Eritreans and the WSLF insurgents. It was in this context that both countries reached an agreement in April 1988 pledging, among other things, not to interfere in each other's internal problem. Thus, for now, internal problems have doused the flame in Somalia's support for the Eritrean movement.

32. Keesing's Contemporary Archives 10 September 1982, p. 31685.

LIBYA

After the overthrow of King Idris Assenusi in 1969, Libya declared its solidarity with the Eritreans in their struggle for self-determination. Apart from moral and diplomatic support, it also extended substantial material assistance to the Eritrean movement. Libyan shipments were then passed through Aden, the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which had also come under a radical Marxist and equally pan-Arabist regime following the victory of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in 1967.³³

Libya, and to some degree, PDRY, had two reasons for supporting the Eritreans. First was Colonel Qaddafi's crusading approach to the ideas of pan-Arabism and Islamic solidarity.³⁴ With its predominantly Islamic background, the ELF was perceived as a veritable ally in the fight for Islam and Arabism. Second, and

33. A.C.R., 1973/74 pp. B.155-156.

34. Oye Ogunbadejo, "Gaddafi's North African Design" International Security, 8(1) Summer 1983, pp. 154-78.

closely related to the above, was the Libyan leader's passionate opposition to Israel, and by extension, any friend or supporter of the 'Zionist' state. Ethiopia's furtive collaboration with Israel therefore served to further stoke up ~~Saddafi's~~ sympathy for the Eritrean cause and by the early 1970s, Libya had become a "prime armorer"³⁵ of the ELF particularly after the anti-Eritrean turn in Sudanese policy in 1971.

Although the Libyan leader welcomed the Ethiopian revolution in 1974, he continued to assist the Eritrean forces. At the same time, he gradually inched his way towards Addis Ababa and, in fact, opened an embassy there in 1975. Samuel Makinda has suggested that this dual posture was probably taken by Tripoli with a view to gaining some leverage with which to mediate in the dispute.³⁶ If this was the objective, it was certainly

35. David E. Albright, "The Horn of Africa and the Arab Israeli Conflict" in Robert O. Freedman (ed) World Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), pp. 147-191, at p. 151.

36. Samuel Makinda, "Shifting Alliances in the Horn of Africa", Survival, Vol. 37(1), January/February 1985, pp. 11-19.

jettisoned too soon, due as much to Libya's broader calculation as to the entreaties of the Ethiopian regime. As a matter of fact, Qaddafi made a complete volte-face early in 1977 and cut off assistance to the Eritrean movement. Later in the year, Libyan delegates visited Addis Ababa and signed bilateral agreements on technical cooperation and trade.³⁷ Between 1977 and 1978, Libyan arms and personnel from the PDRY were sent to assist the Mengistu regime in the Ogaden war as well as the counter-offensives against Eritrean forces. This Libyan-PDRY-Ethiopian camaraderie culminated in a tripartite Treaty of Friendship and cooperation which was signed in Aden on 19 August, 1981.³⁸

Libya's realignment appeared as Qaddafi's reaction to the formation in May 1981 of the Gulf Cooperation Council, comprising the pro-Western states

37. Ibid. See Albright, "The Horn of Africa and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 181.

38. See Africa Contemporary Record, 1981/82 p. B230.

of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirate, Kuwait, Omar and Bahrain.³⁹ On the whole, it was part of a broad strategy aimed at those conservative Arab states, including Egypt and Sudan, that had angered the Libyan leader one way or the other. Siding with Ethiopia, which had then come under a clearly radical, anti-imperialist, and, theoretically, anti-Zionist leadership was certainly a more effective policy than assisting an insurgency over which it had little, if any, leverage and whose future was uncertain.⁴⁰

In 1985, however, the tripartite alliance of Libya, Ethiopia and South Yemen was fractured as a result of Mengistu's acceptance to host that year's summit. Originally scheduled for Tripoli, the summit

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39. See Abd al-Hadi Khalaf "The Elusive Quest for Gulf Security", Middle East Report (MERIP) 17(5) October 1987, pp. 19-22, and Dan Connell, "Alignments in the Horn: Famine in the Deck", MERIP 17(2) March-April 1987, pp. 29-30
40. According to the Africa Contemporary Record Qaddafi's hostility to Nimeiry and Sadat "made him an incongruous bedfellow of the Dergue". See A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B212.

was eventually held in Addis Ababa after it had been twice aborted due to opposition in some African and external quarters to Qaddafi's chairmanship of the organisation. The whole pact was actually rendered nugating following the change of guards in the PDRY's politiburo which led to the ouster of Al Nasser Mohammed.⁴¹ In any case, Libya's relationship with the Mengistu regime had become less than cordial as Qaddafi renewed ties with Somalia and (post-Nimeiry) Sudan and ceased to bank-roll the Ethiopian-backed opposition to these countries.⁴²

Since then, Mengistu had made moves to patch up differences with Tripoli ~~in the bid~~ to rejuvenate the old supply source. Although these efforts led to Qaddafi's visit to Addis Ababa in 1987, the Libyan leader has not

41. See A.C.R., 1983/84, p. B148; 1985/86, p. B318.

42. A.C.R., 1985/86, p. B318.

shown any enthusiasm to renew the injection of money and material into Ethiopia's wars.⁴³

The Organisation of African Unity

The Eritrean struggle for self-determination has been going on for 28 years, making it clearly the longest war in Africa. Yet, it is the least known in the continent. In 1973, Osman Saleh Sabeih had lamented this isolation, stating that it was astonishing that an African cause like the Eritreans' was so little known in Africa and reasoned that this was so because most governments did not want to offend the former Emperor, Haile Selassie, "regarded as the father of the OAU".⁴⁴

Except within the Afro-Arab forum of the Islamic Conference where diplomatic support for the Eritrean cause had come from such states as Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia and Guinea,⁴⁵ no African country, except, of course

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43. Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. XXXIII, No. 9, September 1987, p. 35369.
44. Africa Research Bulletin, March 31, 1973, pp. 2778-9.
45. At the 4th Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference in Benghazi in March 1973, these African states endorsed the declaration expressing "profound sympathy with the Eritrean people" and support for their "legitimate struggle". Ibid.

Libya, Sudan, and Somalia has, as yet, openly recognised, let alone, supported the Eritrean movement. In fact, the Eritrean issue has never featured on the agenda of the organisation. Reacting to the tight isolation of the Eritrean cause in Africa, Aferworki, General Secretary of the EPLF once declared:

Certain countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe etc. were openly expressing their sympathy for the Eritrean struggle. But this was mainly before their Independence. Now, in the majority of cases, those who ascend to power do not maintain their previous positions on Eritrea, or speak the same language as before. When we try to remind them of their previous commitments, they barricade themselves behind "diplomatic" pretexts.⁴⁷

At both levels of individual member states and the regional body, African position in relation to the

46. Tunisia made an abortive move to have an EPLF delegate seated as an official observer at the OAU Foreign Ministers meeting in Kampala in July 1975. Ethiopia, indeed, broke diplomatic relations with Tunis over that incident. See A.S.R., 1975/76, p. B199.

47. See Aferworki's comment in African Events, May 1989, p. 35. Another EPLF official Ermas Dbessai admitted that a few countries, - Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Somalia are hosts to EPLF offices. Its office in Maputo, Mozambique has however been closed down.

Eritrean problem has been conditioned by norms and shared political concerns enshrined in the O.A.U. charter. Right from its inception, the founding members of the organisation were too anxious to protect the fragile states and artificial boundaries bequeathed to them by the former colonial masters. Some of the O.A.U.'s most "enduring articles of faith" are Articles II and III of its charter emphasising non-interference, sovereignty and the sanctity of inherited colonial formations. These principles have, over the years, become a veritable cloak for the organisation's status quo posture vis-a-vis the several conflicts that continue to rage in the continent.⁴⁸ Assessing the import of these provisions, Elenka M'buyinga has noted that:

48. For perspectives on Africa's (and O.A.U.'s) attitude towards intra-state conflicts, see G. A. Nweke, Harmonization of African Foreign Policies, 1955-1975: The Political Economy of African Diplomacy (Boston, MA: African Studies Center, 1980); J. Stemau, The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); and, Cyril Koffie Daddieh of Biafra and the Popular movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA), "International Political Science Review, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1984, pp. 21-46.

The political foundations of the O.A.U. - notably the blatantly hypocritical principle of 'non-interference in the internal affairs of each member state', the toleration extended to all regimes whatever their nature, the respect for the territorial integrity of existing countries, amounting as it does to absolute recognition of the colonial frontiers - are all fundamental breaks with the quest for African unity ... These basic principles of the O.A.U. establish beyond a shadow of doubt that there is a close link between Pan-African demagogy and micro-nationalism in Africa, since the principles insist on the maintenance of the existing status quo.⁴⁹

In the bid to persuade the O.A.U., Eritreans have always insisted that their case is one of unresolved decolonisation and that Selassie's forcible annexation of their territory in violation of the UN resolution 390 A(V) cannot make the matter an internal problem of Ethiopia anymore than South Africa's prolonged occupation of Namibia did make the latter an internal problem of the apartheid state. Moreover, they invoke the O.A.U.'s position on the inalienable rights of peoples to self-determination as an unassailable justification for their cause. Arguing along similar lines, Tom Fifer had

49. Elenga M'buyinga, Pan-Africanism or Neo-Colonialism: The Bankruptcy of the O.A.U. (London: Zed Press, 1982) p. 163.

told a US Senate Subcommittee that Eritrea:

"... is not Biafra, Katanga, or, for that matter the Ogaden. Eritrea was a self-contained colonial unit and therefore can itself rely on the sanctity of colonial boundaries which is holy writ in the Third World above all in Africa..."⁵⁰

Despite these entreaties, the organisation has been unimpressed and has continued to ignore the Eritrean problem.

Obviously, Eritrea is fraught with implications for the basic OAU Principle of the sanctity of borders and these ramify beyond the immediate confines of Ethiopia, and even the Horn of Africa. Given the vulnerability of several African states to nationalist agitations, the OAU fears

⁵⁰, United States Senate, Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 80. For the Eritreans' argument, see "Editorial: Eritrea and the OAU" in Liberation, (EPLF), Vol. 1, No. 4, May-June 1981, p. 4.

that recognition for the Eritreans could encourage and create legitimacy for secessionist claims against member states. Although Farer has dismissed this "domino theory" as being "highly conjectural",⁵¹ it nonetheless remains an alibi for the organisation's "total immobility" on conflicts within African states. As Amadu Sesay has summed it up:

... in their eagerness to preserve the status quo, the founding fathers ignored a cardinal principle which they had all fought for in the run up to independence: self-determination within independent African states. Now, no group of people has a right to separate statehood in any independent member state no matter how genuine their case might be ... (and) this situation was to contribute a great deal to the inability of the organisation to tackle some of the contemporary issues confronting its members.⁵²

Thus, as the OAU's principles became moribund in the midst of heightened political conflicts, concrete initiatives have been left to external forces thereby further compromising the relevance of the regional body.

As Leslie Brown has succinctly concluded that:

51. Tom J. Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Stom (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979) p. 137; see, also, Onyeonoro S. Kamanu, "Secession and the right of self-determination: an OAU dilemma" Journal of Modern African Studies 12(3) September 1974, pp. 355-76.

52. Amadu Sesay, "The OAU and Continental Order", pp. 170-1.

To the extent that African conflicts have tended to develop a deep-rooted social character, they are not easily dealt with through the OAU's diplomatic machinery which is better suited to the resolution of disputes among states, external pressures have undermined the collective resolve.⁵³

The second explanation for the OAU's attachment to the maintenance of territorial status quo at all costs is the contradiction between the twin principles of self-determination and sovereignty.⁴⁵ Although self-determination had earlier been established as the generic right to self-rule as well as the ordering principle of international relations, since the Second World War, however, its application has become ~~originally~~ restrictive. In its new garb, the concept has become seriously circumscribed leaving no room for the problem of nationalities within individual states.

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53. Leslie H. Brown, "Regional Collaboration in resolving third-world conflicts", Survival May/June 1986, pp. 208-220.
54. For a thorough elaboration of this theme, see James Mayall, "Self-determination and the OAU" in I. M. Lewis (ed) Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa pp. 77-91, and, "Post-Colonial Africa: A Diplomatic malaise" in Stephen Write and Janice N. Brownfoot (ed); African World Politics, op. cit., pp. 129-139.

Besides, it is now held to be synonymous with the principle of non-interference by others in a state's domestic affairs.

At the time the OAU was created, the principle of self-determination had been fully tied to anti-colonialism or de-colonisation - a right exclusive to peoples struggling against European occupation. Conceived in this way, it immediately ruled out any territorial revision as well all claims by aggrieved nationalities within a state.⁵⁵ Moreover, it led to the domestication of pan-Africanism thereby check-mating the continentalist advocacy of some radical African leaders who envisioned a "United States of Africa".⁵⁶

Apart from those in Southern Africa, the O.A.U. has simply ignored the "left-over liberation movements"⁵⁷

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55. Ibid. See also, Bukar Bukarambe, "Conflict and Conflict Management in Africa: The Role and Impact of OAU in the management of African conflict". Survival, Vol. 25 No. 2, March/April 1983 pp. 50-58; also, Colin Legum, "The Organisation of African Unity as an Instrument of Africa's Foreign Policy".
56. On the radical current within the pan-African movement, see for instance, Kwame Nkrumah, I Speak of Freedom (New York: Praeger, 1961), and Immanuel Wallerstein, Africa: The Politics of Unity (New York: Vintage, 1967).
57. 1. William Zartwan, Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 8.

whatever the merit of their case, more so, when the occupying powers are African. James Mayall has contended that the "anti-colonial thesis applies with more force to Eritrea" but, as he also pointed out, the OAU does not want to jeopardise its existence by classifying one of its members as a colonial power.⁵⁸ Yet, as Sherman bluntly concluded, "until the Eritrean problem is resolved, it will remain a unique thorn in the side of the OAU".⁵⁹

The Arabs and the Eritrean Conflict

Arab interest in the Red Sea region dates back to the period before European colonial scramble. Sequal to the ~~opening of the Suez Canal and its transformation~~ into a major international artery, the Red Sea became a focal point of competing regional interests. Up till 19th century, Egypt, for example, had invaded and controlled parts of the coastal principalities at

58. James Mayall, "Self-determination and the OAU", p. 87.

59. Richard Sherman, Eritrea, The Unfinished Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 136.

various times. These early ~~incursions were motivated~~ primarily by the exigencies of Islamic and territorial expansionism.⁶⁰

Towards the end of the last century, European colonialism and the consolidation of the Ethiopian empire-state virtually checkmated Arab designs on the territories adjoining the Red Sea. These interests were however rekindled by Eritrean nationalism and, as the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict gathered momentum, there began a gradual extension of the Middle Eastern politics to the Horn in general and Eritrea in particular.⁶¹ Trevaskis had characteristically apprehended this possibility thus:

The Eritrean Moslem accepted a federal association with Ethiopia reluctantly, and he would be the first to resent undue Ethiopian control over his affairs. In such an event, Ethiopia will do well to reflect on the changing Middle Eastern scene and the growing political influence and appeal of Islam. With British authority withdrawn from the Sudan, with British influence removed from Egypt, and with an independent

60. See Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa (London: Holywood Press, 1977), p. 20.

61. See Frank Boyce, "The Internationalizing of Internal War: Ethiopia, the Arabs, and the Case of Eritrea", op. cit. p. 58.

Somali already in sight, Ethiopia is becoming encompassed by ambitions, vigorous and free Moslem States. In such circumstances, Moslem discontent in Eritrea would be singularly dangerous.⁶²

Arab support for the ELF was initially based on sectarian and religious grounds given the original muslim background and orientation of the movement. At the General Assembly of the United Nations in the late 1940s, Islamic-Arab opposition to the federation arrangement was very stiff, provoking in return, a bitter anti-Arab campaign by Ethiopia. Between June and July 1946 for instance, Addis Ababa expelled several Arabs and confiscated their property.⁶³ But then, this only served to stoke the opposition of the Arab states to Ethiopia's claims to Eritrea.

As the Arab-Israeli dispute ramified and extended to the Horn in the 1960s, the question of Eritrean self-determination was no longer the pristine Islamic issue of the 1940s but had assumed concrete

62. Trevaskis, op. cit., p. 130.

63. Ibid., p. 67.

ideological and strategic dimensions even at the regional level. To begin with, some of the Middle East actors' territories adjoin the Red Sea and its extensions such as the Gulf of Suez and that of Aqaba. Naturally, therefore, what happens in the Horn of Africa posed potential security and economic implications for them.

Up till the early 1970s, Ethiopia's military and diplomatic standing held in check foreign involvement in the Eritrean insurgency and the neighbouring Arab regimes tended to oscillate between verbal support and outright indifference to the nationalist movement. In the wake of the Ethiopian revolution, certain developments served to reactivate the interest of the Red Sea Arab states in Eritrean nationalism.

First was the general disorder and turmoil which left Ethiopia militarily weak and isolated from its erstwhile backers. Another crucial factor was the ideological re-orientation in Addis Ababa - the adoption of 'scientific socialism' - in December 1974.

For the neighbouring Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Egypt, this development simplified matters as the Eritrean problem was then seen as a straightforward conflict between a Marxist Ethiopian regime and a nationalist movement that subscribed to Arabism and pan-Islamic solidarity. Moreover, the increasingly militarist attitude of the Dergue toward Eritrea also spurred the Arabs into supporting the insurgency. Initially, when the Andom-led Dergue offered a peaceful solution to the problem, the neighbouring Arab states were willing to give it a chance, and, indeed, hailed it along this course. But, as the junta hardened its position, more so after the assassination of Andom who was widely seen as being moderate, these states began to distance themselves from Ethiopia and moved closer to the Eritreans. Consequently, between late 1974 and early 1975, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and Kuwait had joined Syria and Iraq in extending increased material support to the movement.⁶⁴

64. See A.C.R. 1975/76, p. B200.

As noted above, Arab support for the insurgents stemmed initially from a common sectarian and racial premise. In the course of time though, their interests have become variegated and tempered by other considerations. Basically, there are four major factors that have shaped Arab policy in the Horn in general, and over Eritrea, in particular.⁶⁵

One is the imperative of Arab nationalism. Because of the religious and cultural affinities between them, the Arabs see Eritreans not only as fellow Muslims, but, more importantly, they regard Eritrean nationalism as part and parcel of the Arab cause.

Second, and closely intertwined with the above is the Israeli factor which, until the late 1970s, had been a rallying point in Arab diplomacy. Two factors make Eritrea relevant to Arab policy against Israel. One is the Israeli-Ethiopian alliance which automatically

65. For a fuller discussion of the bases of Arab policy on Eritrea, see, Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, pp. 151-4.

makes the latter to be perceived as anti-Arab. Arab support for the Eritreans, therefore, can be seen as a counter-poise to the relationship between Tel-Avin and Addis Ababa. In the early 1970s, Eritrea was to serve as a crucial lynch-pin for the Arabs' design to dominate the Red Sea and the widely touted bid to cut off Israel from the sea routes.

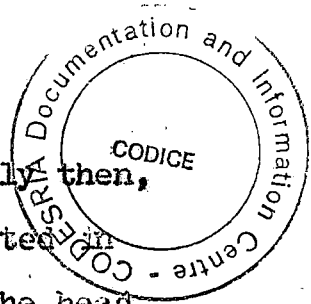
The third issue in Arab policy is Sudan. By its location as the meeting point of the Afro-Arab Sudan ranks very high in the consideration of the major Arab states. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt have major stakes in a stable and friendly regime in Khartoum. Egypt, for one, needs access to Sudanese land for its farmers and, more importantly, given the "hydropolitics" of the region, it has a crucial interest in maintaining friendly relationships with the regime which controls the Nile's headwaters. For its part, Saudi Arabia also needs Sudanese food for its teeming urban population and this exigency led to the much-orchestrated plan to turn Sudan into the "Arab breadbasket".⁶⁶ Given

66. Under a Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti-sponsored plan, Sudan was expected to benefit from a ten-year investment worth \$2.2 billion which would enable her provide the Arab world about half of its food requirements. See Africa (London) No. 83, July 1978, p. 85.

Sudan's uneasy relationship with Ethiopia over the Eritrean question, Arab interest thus includes the imperative of staving off external threat to Khartoum's stability.

Finally, for some of the moderate Arabs, there is the ideological factor, manifested in their morbid fear of revolutionary tendencies, or, more precisely, communist influence in the Red Sea area. In this category are such states as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan whose fear of communist (and Soviet) influences had become a major factor in their foreign policies. During the 1970s, it led to attempts by these states to contain the Ethiopian and South Yemenese revolutionary regimes and, more directly, to stifle the radical tendencies within the Eritrean movement and steer it along a desired conservative and sectarian direction.

A competing ideological tendency was equally being championed by the radical Arab countries, particularly, Syria and Iraq, whose role eventually helped sustain the Eritreans when the conservative states withdrew their support because of the



radicalisation of the movement.⁶⁷ Inevitably then, a by-product of Arab differences had reflected in divisions with the Eritrean movement. As the head of the EPLF's foreign relations department admitted:

The Arab stand on the Eritrean question is a clear stand of support for our cause. This stand, however, is not often translated into tangible things. Some find cover behind Eritrean differences as an excuse not to extend any assistance, with the full knowledge that these are not new but old differences. After all, a big aspect of the Arab differences has reflected itself in deepening our Eritrean differences...⁶⁸

Towards the end of the 1970s, Arab support for the Eritrean struggle tended to dry up. After suffering another defeat in the October 1973 war with Israel, the

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- 67. See James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984), pp. 49-50.
 - 68. See the interview with Al-Amin Mohamed said, member of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the EPLF and head of the Department of Foreign Relations, in Liberation, Vol. 1(1), April 1982, p. 9. Besides the broad radical-conservative division within the Arab camp, other intra-Arab cleavages such as the inter-Ba'thi rivalry between Syria and Iraq had also reflected in the competing support given by these countries to rival Eritrean factions. See, for example, Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", New Left Review, 67, May-June 1971, pp. 57-67.

pan-Arabist cause seemed to lose some of its appeal to the major Arab states. Also contributory was Ethiopia's diplomatic offensive in the Arab world which, to some extent, successfully robbed the Eritreans the support of some of their former supporters. An indication of this decline in Arab support was given in September 1977 when Osman Sabbe petitioned the Arab league to allocate \$30 million in emergency aid to the Eritrean movement to procure arms. The following year, apparently frustrated by the poor response to his earlier entreaty, Sabbe chastised the Arab states for failing to give more than "symbolic aid" despite their "propaganda fanfare".⁶⁹

Although pledges of support continued to come from some quarters, the deepening of Arab hostilities in the wake of the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war further relegated Eritrea to the outer fringes of Arab concerns. As a result, throughout the 1980s, the Eritreans have had to live with far less material support from their

69. See David E. Albright, "The Horn of Africa and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", in op. cit. p. 170.

erstwhile Arab friends. This fact was admitted again by Osman Sabbe in April 1986 when he stated that as a result of Arab in-fighting and the changed situation in the Middle East, the movement was no longer receiving substantial aid from its Arab and other friends.⁷⁰ All the same, until his death, Sabbe continued to petition for aid from the Arab states.⁷¹

EGYPT

Egypt's interest in present-day Eritrea dates far back in time, as it had always sought control over the Red Sea Coast. During the last century, it occupied Massawa in 1848 and then, between 1872 and 1884, took control of the entire coastal area of the Red Sea.⁷²

In the 1950s, Egypt was also the first Arab state to take an active interest in the Eritrean question by

70. A.C.R., 1985/86, p. B294.

71. See Keessing's 1987 Record of World Events, Vol. xxxiii, No. 9 (1987), p. 353669.

72. See Haggai Erlich, Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alula (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1982).

supporting the nationalists who advocated for Eritrean independence.⁷³ Under President Nasser, Egypt maintained a radical profile in foreign policy, championing the Arabist as well as supporting nationalist causes in Africa. Cairo gave funds and was host to many nationalist groups, including the Eritrean Liberation Front.⁷⁴ As noted earlier, several Eritrean leaders were based in Cairo and in 1958, a training camp for Eritrean cadres was opened near Alexandria.⁷⁵

From the early 1960s, however, Egypt's position on the Eritrean cause gradually became ambivalent. One development that influenced and tempered Nasser's radical posturing was the emergence of the OAU and its position of "non-interference" in member states' internal affairs. As a founding member of this organisation, Nasser had tried to respect and identify

73. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, March 2-9, 1957, p. 15410.

74. See Jon Kraus, "Islamic Affinities and International Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa", Current History, April 1980, pp. 142-158, and 182-4.

75. See A.C.R., 1975/76, pp. C110-114; also, Legum and Lee, op. cit., p. 25.

with the interests of its members. Besides, and more importantly, he had begun to cultivate African support for his anti-Israeli policy. Because of this exigency, he had to mend fences and warm up to notable African leaders, particularly, Emperor Haile Selassie, who then possessed a towering standing in African diplomatic circles.⁷⁶

Nasser's objective coincided with Selassie's stance, who also had a stake in persuading Egypt to end its support for the Eritrean insurgents. To this end, the Ethiopian monarch visited Cairo in 1963 and had talks with President Nasser "in an atmosphere of fraternity, cordiality and mutual understanding". Throughout the talks, the Eritrean issue was not mentioned and at the end, both leaders agreed on "increased cooperation between the two countries in the political, economic and cultural fields".⁷⁷ Sequel to this agreement, the training facility for the ELF was closed down and moved to Algeria.⁷⁸

76. Frank Boyce, "The Internationalizing of Internal War" op. cit. pp. 59-60.

77. Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 63.

78. Ibid.

Early in 1967, there were reports of renewal of Egyptian support for the Eritreans movement and this precipitated tensions in the relations between the two. However, Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War dealt a fatal blow to Nasser's pan-Arabist crusade. A consequence of this was that it further diverted his attention from the little insurgency in Eritrea. Up till his death in 1970, the Egyptian leader maintained a generally passive and lukewarm attitude towards the Eritrean war and this posture persisted even with his successor, Anwar Sadat.

In the wake of the Ethiopian revolution and the Dergue's alliance with Moscow, Egypt and the other neighbouring Arab State embarked on a frenzied reorientation of their Red Sea policy, culminating in a renewed pro-Eritrean stand.⁷⁹ Cairo, for one, had reasons to be alarmed at the new reality in Ethiopia. First, Ethiopia is the source of about 70 per cent of the Nile's water which is the very life-blood of

79. See Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, pp. 157-160.

Egypt. Sadat's concern then stemmed from the fear of possible Soviet-Ethiopian obstruction of the river's waters.⁸⁰ Secondly, since the reopening of the Suez Canal in 1975, the Red Sea had once again become one of the most important water-ways in the world. The consolidation of Soviet presence in Ethiopia, therefore, triggered Egyptian fears of Soviet domination of the southern stretch of the Red Sea. Consequently, Cairo began to coordinate its Red Sea policy with other Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, and this project was promptly dubbed as the "Arabisation of the Red Sea".⁸¹ Between 1974 and 1975, Egypt and the other state channelled increased assistance to the Eritreans and this helped to fuel the insurgency.

Throughout the 1970s, Egypt remained apprehensive of Soviet presence in Ethiopia. During a visit to the US in February 1978, President Sadat remarked that

80. See John Waterbury, Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), passim.

81. Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 68.

the Soviet Union had "taken over power in Ethiopia" and could threaten Egypt's trade route through the Red Sea.⁸² Also, in 1980, he charged that Moscow was behind plans to destabilise his country by tampering with the Nile. Egypt's suspicions generated bitter exchanges between Cairo and Addis Ababa and eventually led to the rupture in relations between the two.⁸³

As part of its renewed efforts to isolate the Eritreans from their Arab supporters, the Mengistu regime started to make conciliatory moves to Egypt in the early 1980s. These were reciprocated by the Egyptians who also sought to improve relations with Ethiopia, partly to break out of the diplomatic cold in which it had been left by the Arab states after signing the Camp David accord with Israel in 1979, and to counteract the now defunct Ethiopian-Libyan alliance.⁸⁴

82. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, May 26, 1978, p. 28992.

83. A.C.R., 1980/81, p. B197.

84. Makinda, "Shifting Alliances in the Horn of Africa", op. cit., p. 16.

From all indications, these moves seemed to have gained fruit as relations between the two have steadily improved. Egyptian firms have reportedly secured extensive mining concessions and construction contracts in Ethiopia.⁸⁵ In addition, leaders of both countries met in December 1986, although the rapprochement was only fully consummated during President Mengistu's visit to Cairo in April 1987.

In the aftermath of this visit, President Mubarak ordered the closure of ELF offices in Cairo and the cessation of political work by Eritrean refugees.⁸⁶ Of course, this volte-face amounted to a setback for the Eritreans. Commenting on this development, the EPLF Secretary-General, Isayas Aferworki expressed disappointment with Egypt for using "Eritrea as a bargaining chip" in its diplomatic realignment. He concluded that Egypt "has not only denied the Eritrean people's right to self-determination, but even attempts to legitimize the annexation of Eritrea by imperial Ethiopia in 1962".⁸⁷

85. Dan Connell, "Alignments in the Horn: Famine in the Deck", op. cit., p. 29.

86. Keesing's 1987 Record of World Events, September 1987, p. 35369.

87. Africa Events (London), May 1987, p. 35.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia's involvement in the insurgency stems largely from its religious affinity with Eritrea's moslem population. As the custodians of the holy places of Mecca and Medina, the Saudis regard their country as the bastion of Islamic values and feel obliged to defend and assist other Moslems.⁸⁸ At first, Saudi Arabia maintained a generally low and defensive profile in foreign policy and despite its espousal of support for the Eritrean movement, this did not translate into tangible assistance. Beyond the occasional denunciation of Ethiopia's persecution of Moslems, Riyadh's support was limited to token and furtive donations.⁸⁹ Even then, it quickly reneged on this in protest against the contamination of the movement by the absorption of Christians into the ELF. Subsequent efforts by the nationalists to de-emphasise religion further served to widen the distance

88. See William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), especially pp. 43-45.

89. See Albright, "The Horn of Africa and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 151.

between them and Riyadh culminating in the outright withdrawal of support in 1967.

Perhaps a more constraining factor on its flirtation with the Eritreans was the diplomatic and military standing of Ethiopia under Emperor Haile Selassie. To an appreciable degree, Selassie had effectively held in check the neighbouring Arab states' support for the insurgency and deterred them from pursuing an active Red Sea policy. He achieved this policy partly through constant diplomatic appeasement of these states whose support for the Eritreans could prove to be very crucial. For instance, in June 1971, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Ketema Yifru paid a 4-day visit to Riyadh with a view to promoting closer Ethio-Saudi relations. A communique at the end of the visit stated that in regard to the Middle East, "both countries reiterated their demand for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories".⁹¹ Again, in January 1974,

90. Ibid.

91. A.C.R., 1971/72, p. B119.

the Ethiopian monarch himself visited Riyadh and was not only warmly received, but also got a \$35 million aid for famine relief.⁹²

After Selassie's ouster, however, and as the PMAC adopted a clearly militarist posture over the Eritrean question, the Saudis renewed their contacts with, and support for, the nationalist movement. Twice in 1974, Osman Sabbe met with King Faisal who promised financial and diplomatic assistance to the movement.⁹³ At the same time, Riyadh also began to coordinate its pro-Eritrean policy with Sudan and Egypt and by 1975, this concerted pro-Eritrean policy (involving Saudi Arabia) had presented Ethiopia with an unprecedented Arab challenge to its territorial integrity.

The activation of Saudi Arabia's interest in the Eritrean problem at this time has to be seen within the context of its emergent regional role. In the aftermath of Yom Kippur war of 1973, Saudi Arabia

92. Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 68.

93. See A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B200.

gradually emerged as a state with considerable wealth and regional clout. By the middle of that decade, it had become quite active in the Red Sea and the entire Middle East region, using oil and the financial power derived from it. Moreover, it forged a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the United States with significant ramifications for its foreign policy.⁹⁵

The Riyadh-Washington connection underscores a large confluence of interests both strategically and ^{financially} financially. Through the recycling of huge sums of petrodollars held in bills and bank deposits, the Saudi economy has become closely tied to, and dependent on, the American economy and financial system.⁹⁶ Strategically, the Saudi concern with regional security and quest for sophisticated military hardware coincided with US objectives to increase its

95. See William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, op. cit.; and, Adeed I. Dawisha, "Internal Values and External Threats: The Making of Saudi Foreign Policy", ORBIS Vol. 23(1), Spring, 1979, pp. 129-143.

96. See, for instance, Goffredo Caccia, "Nigeria: Oil Plot or Oil Glut", Journal of African Marxists, 3, January 1983, especially, 78-92, especially pp. 79-82.

military strength in the Middle East area.

Furthermore, both states, are committed to bolstering conservative regimes and getting rid of Soviet influence in the region.⁹⁷

Thus, when the Saudis resumed their support for the Eritreans in the mid 1970s, it was essentially in response to the radical (leftist) posturing of the junta which had overthrown the Ethiopian monarchy. Even then, the Saudis were only interested in strengthening the pan-Arabist Moslem forces at the expense of the Marxist oriented factions within the movement. All along, Riyadh had made no secret about its discomfort over the increasing strength of the radical forces within the nationalist movement, fearing that an independent Marxist Eritrean state could bolster communist influence and fuel regional radicalisation.⁹⁸

97. See Newsweek, March 6, 1978, pp. 12-16; and The Middle East, January 1982, pp. 13-16.

98. See James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down, p. 49.

The Eritrean leadership is clearly apprehensive of Saudi concerns and objective vis-a-vis the Eritrean cause. As Aferworki once summed up:

The problem with the Saudis (who sponsored the Jeddah agreement) is that they are in full contradiction with the aspirations of our society. The Saudis' plan is to use the Eritrean struggle as an external buffer area for balancing and creating pressures here and there to influence the situation in the Horn as a whole and Ethiopia in particular. For them Eritrea is an instrument. Theirs is not a genuine interest in supporting self-determination for the Eritrean people... We have openly told them that we are socialist and our line is very clear. And we are independent, we don't ally ourselves with any power within this region. They consider the EPLF a threat because if the EPLF succeeds, the Eritrean card will not be in their hands. So they have to create organisations and support other groups outside the EPLF.⁹⁹

In the bid to stifle the radical tendency within the movement, Saudi Arabia has been keen at promoting unification of the other factions, threatening to cut off aids unless they forged a common front.¹⁰⁰ And,

99. Ibid., p. 139.

100. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, July 1983, p. 32238.

following the refusal of the EPLF to join in the unity talks, it closed down the front's two offices in Jeddah and Riyadh.¹⁰¹ A Saudi-emissary, Abduallah Baharable promised substantial support for a united organisation and this induced the other factions to form the Eritrean Unified National Council in 1985.¹⁰² Reacting to this development, the EPLF accused the Saudi Arabian government of trying to "create a puppet organisation which it hoped could challenge the EPLF and also serve their interventionist aims". It further charged that:

This notorious agreement was initiated with the sole aim of obstructing the EPLF-initiated unity process. Moreover, the Saudi government, hoping to weaken the EPLF by strengthening its preferred agents, the Abdalla Idris group, in particular, provided money and arms and pressure them to infiltrate their forces into Eritrea from the Sudan.¹⁰³

Clearly, relations between Riyadh and the EPLF have since become icy and in the words of Ermias Debessai, a member of the front's Central

101. A.C.R., 1984/85, p. B237.

102. Ibid.

103. See the "Important Statement" in Adulis (Central Bureau of Foreign Relations of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front), Vol I No. 9, March 1985, p. 3.

Committee, Saudis have become "often hostile".¹⁰⁴
 All the same, Riyadh continues to aid the moderate elements within the movement and had even reportedly been pressing the US to assist the Eritrean forces and show them "the same degree of understanding as was shown to the Contras of Nicaragua and Unita in Angola".¹⁰⁵

SYRIA

From the beginning, Syria has been one of the closest and most consistent supporters of the Eritrean movement. In fact, the first consignment of foreign supplies - 20 Kalashnikov assault rifles - came from Damascus in mid-1964.¹⁰⁶ Like the other Arab states, Syria's commitment to the Eritrean cause stems from

104. Communication with Ermias Debassai, Head of EPLF's Foreign Relations, Europe Office, (London), March 8, 1989.

105. See A.C.R. 1985/86 p. B318; also, Bob Woodward, Veil: The Secret Wars of the C.I.A. 1981-1987 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, especially p. 373).

106. A.C.R., 1970/71 p. B103, and Osman Saleh Sabbe, The Root of the Eritrean Disagreement (Beirut, 1978), p. 41.

pan-Arabism and its Ba'thist regime regards Eritrea as an integral part of the Arab world. As a matter of fact, the 1952 constitution of the Ba'th Party defines the "Arab homeland" as extending beyond... the Ethiopian mountains", that is, including Eritrea.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, as soon as the ELF opened its office in Damascus in June 1963, the Syrians provided generous support and facilities such as the training camp at Aleppo where several fighters received instructions. In addition, the Eritreans were given free access to radio facility, thus enabling them to pour out a steady stream of anti-Ethiopian propaganda.¹⁰⁸ Reminiscing recently, Woldaab Wolde Mariam, one of the founders of the ELF, and its former Secretary-General and ambassador plenipotentiary, enthused:

104. See Muhammed Khalil, The Arab States and the Arab League: Vol. 1 Constitutional Development (Beirut: Khayats, 1962).

108. A.C.R., 1968/69, p. B148.

We went to Damascus to discuss the situation with our Syrian friends. They received us warmly and allowed us to broadcast our revolutionary messages on the radio to our revolutionary children.¹⁰⁹

During the 1960s, Syria consistently supported the Eritrean movement and in a statement over Damascus radio on 28 September 1968, the ELF acknowledged the "aid offered by certain fraternal Arab countries, particularly Syria".¹¹⁰ Damascus' backing for the insurgency was vividly demonstrated in December 1969 when two Syrians were shot dead in an abortive hijack of an Ethiopian Airlines plane.¹¹¹ After the split within the movement, it continued to support the Eritrean cause, although its sympathy then remained with the parent organisation - the ELF-RC.¹¹²

Along the line, however, Syrian foreign policy objectives had broadened in response to the dynamics of Israeli conflict and also of intra-Arab politics. In addition, Damascus has had to accommodate the exigences

109. Eritrea Information, Vol. 9, No. 7, 1987, p. 12.

110. A.C.R., 1968/69, p. B148.

111. A.C.R., 1970/71, p. B102.

112. A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B200.

of the pact with the USSR even as it seeks to assert its independence of the Kremlin.¹¹³ In these constraining circumstances, and following series of overtures by the Mengistu regime, Damascus agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Addis Ababa. At the end of a 4-day visit by the Ethiopian Foreign Minister in 1980, both sides agreed to "observe strictly the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs".¹¹⁴

Shortly after the Ethiopian-USSR treaty of 1979, Syria had also signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union on 8 October 1980. Given their position as treaty clients of the USSR in their respective regimes, the mutual friendship with Moscow was very crucial to the rapprochement between Damascus and Addis Ababa. For, as Zafar Imam has observe, the USSR usually endeavours to "identify and converge" its own interest at global, regional and bilateral

113. See Robert G. Newmann, "Assad and the Future of Middle East", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 62(2) (Winter), 1983/84, pp. 237-256.

114. A.C.R., 1980/81, p. B197-98.

levels with those of its treaty partners.¹¹⁵ Article 11 of the Syrian-Soviet pact actually stipulated that neither party would "enter into alliances or participate in any groupings or in any activity directed against the other".¹¹⁶

Although the Soviet factor had ensured a thaw in relations between Addis Ababa and Damascus, it was still not sufficient to wean Syria away from the Eritreans. As a matter of fact, no sooner had the Ethiopian delegation left Damascus in 1980 than an EPLF team arrived "at the invitation of the Syrian government".¹¹⁷ And, according to a statement issued by the front after the visit, the "Syrian Baath Party and government reaffirmed their unreserved support for the Eritrean people's right to self-determination and full independence ... and that the improvement of Damascus' relations with Addis Ababa would not be effected at the expense of the Eritrean struggle".¹¹⁸

115. Zafar Imam "Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries", Soviet Studies, Vol. XXXV(4) October 1983, pp. 53-70, at p. 67.

116. Keessing's, July 1983, p. 32238.

117. Dimtsi Hafash (Newsletter of the EPLF) Vol. 2 No. 12, September 15, 1980.

118. Ibid.

Nonetheless, the EPLF was clearly perturbed by Syria's decision to acquiesce in diplomatic relations with Ethiopia and indeed made sustained efforts to counteract Addis Ababa's overtures and recoup its leverage with the Syrian leadership. Between 1980 and 1982, it sent several high-level missions for talks, or more precisely, to procure pledges of support from Damascus. On one of such occasions in February 1982, the EPLF's former Secretary General, Ramadan Mohammed Nur, tendered the "Eritrean people's appreciation for the stands of the (Syrian) Arab Socialist Ba'th party, the government and people of Syria and their support for the Eritrean peoples struggle for the achievement of their legitimate national objective".¹¹⁹ These efforts and entreaties seemed to have paid-off as Syria continued to support the movement diplomatically and materially. Evidence that Syrian support had soured its fragile diplomatic relations with Addis Ababa came in 1985 when the Mengistu regime identified Damascus as one of those supporting the insurgency.¹²⁰ Even though the

119. Liberation, January/April 1982, p. 17.

120. See A.C.R., 1984/85, p. B237.

Eritreans now rely more on their own resources, they still acknowledge and cherish the support (even if only diplomatic) given by Syria.¹²¹

IRAQ

Iraq's commitment to the Eritrean movement stems from the same considerations as Syria's and its support for the insurgents became noticeable as soon as the Ba'athist forces came to power in Baghdad in July 1968.¹²² By the mid-1970s, Iraq had become the key patron of the movement - through the ELF-RC - which it consistently supported despite the division within the nationalist front.¹²³ For most part of the 1980s, however, it was bogged down in a protracted war with Iran and this inevitably denied the Eritreans much of the concrete support that used to come from Baghdad.¹²⁴ All the same, Eritrean sources continue

121. Communication with EPLF official March, 8, 1989

122. See David E. Albright, "The Horn of Africa and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 151.

123. See A.C.R., 1973/74, p. B155.

124. On the Iran-Iraq War, see, Richard Cottam, "Regional Implications of the Gulf War", Survival, Vol. XXVIII(b), November/December 1986, pp. 483-523.

to list Iraq as one of their supporters.¹²⁵

ISRAEL

Israel's support for Ethiopia dates back to the late 1950s when the Israelis began to link up with pro-Western countries in the periphery of the Middle East with a view to stemming the rising tide of Arabism. In 1960, the Israeli Minister of Agriculture visited Addis Ababa and had talks with the Ethiopian Monarch.¹²⁶ Sequel to the talks, on 23 October 1961, Ethiopia extended full de jure recognition to Israel through a message to Golda Meir (Israel's Foreign Minister) in which Selassie expressed the hope for "closer and more fruitful collaboration between the two countries in all fields of human endeavour".¹²⁷ Shortly after, the Israelis opened an embassy in Addis Ababa while the latter also maintained a consulate in Jerusalem. Thus began Israeli support for Ethiopia in various fields particularly in the area of security and counter-insurgency.

125. Personal Communication with EPLF officials, March 1989.

126. Keesing's, December 2-9, 1961, p. 18471.

127. Ibid.

Israeli assistance to Ethiopia became manifest through the activities of its officers who helped to train Selassie's "Emergency Police" - a counter-insurgency outfit designed to combat the Eritrean insurgency. By 1966, its military mission in Ethiopia had about 100 staff which, in conjunction with American officers, gave instructions and advice to the Ethiopian army, police and counter-insurgency units.¹²⁸

This cooperation between Tel Aviv and Addis Ababa was founded on some mutual fears and identity of interests. In the first place, and perhaps the most salient factor, is the fact that both countries share the Bible and a common enemy - Arabism. Secondly, they both have a crucial stake in the free flow of shipping through the Red Sea which is, for Israel, the lifeline to Persian Gulf oil, and for Ethiopia, her trade with the rest of the world.¹²⁹ Aside, the Ethiopian connection represented for Israel a significant diplomatic in-road into the African continent. Furthermore, it served to strengthen its

128. See Abel Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66", African Affairs Vol. 9(2) August 1971, pp. 165-87, at p. 175.

129. Ibid.

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ties with the US with which it shared a joint military commitment to Ethiopia. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, it was an insurance against the Arabization of the only non-Arab country on the Red Sea littoral.¹³⁰

In almost every respect, then, Israeli and Ethiopian interests coincided over the imperative of preventing Eritrea from becoming an independent state. Worse still, Eritreans themselves have wittingly or otherwise done very little to assuage Israeli fears. On the contrary, by their frequent tirades against Israeli Zionists, the close identification with Arab forces and the portrayal of the Eritrean struggle as an integral part of the Arab cause, the nationalist fronts might have further goaded Tel Aviv into a warmer embrace of Addis Ababa. At the Rabat Conference of the Arab League in October 1974, for instance, Eritrean

130. See the testimony by J. H. Spencer, former Chief Adviser to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ninety-Four Congress, 2nd Session, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 53.

delegates made a request to join the organisation's committees, as observers, "and thus make it possible for the Arab people of Eritrea, who are an integral part of the Arab nation... to become a member of the Arab League upon gaining independence".¹³¹

~~As earlier noted~~, despite its apparently non-sectarian and radical orientation, the EPLF has also maintained and continues to maintain a clearly pro-Arab stance. On virtually every issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it has consistently ~~taken~~ sides with the Arabs. In an address in 1981 to the International Conference on solidarity with Iraq - over the bombing of its nuclear plant at Tammuz, the EPLF's head of foreign relations bureau, Mohammed Saïd exhorted that:

It is not enough to condemn the zionist aggression against the Iraq nuclear plant. We must go beyond condemnation and call for the immediate alliance of the Arab patriotic and nationalist forces... The zionist aggression was committed not only against Iraq and the Arab nation but also against the African, Asian and Latin American peoples wishing to exercise their right to liberation, progress and peace.¹³²

131. Quoted in Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 69.

132. Liberation (5) September 1981, p. 29.

Almost inevitably, then, Israeli alliance with Ethiopia became all the more imperative, especially in the wake of increased tensions in Arab-Israeli relations. One major factor in this closer alignment was the much-orchestrated Arab plot to blockade Bab-el-Mandeb with a view to closing this southern strait of the Red Sea to Israeli shipping. As one observer alerted then:

Bab-el-Mandeb, a little known Gulf of Aden - Red Sea passage more vital to maritime power than the straits of Tiran at the Gulf of Adaba far to the north, has been an integral part of the Arab noose slowly being tightened around Israel's neck.¹³³

In the early 1970s, there were extensive media campaigns in Arab capitals on the need to close the strait to Israeli-bound shipping. In 1972, for example, the Egyptian newspaper, Al Ahram, argued for a change of name from Red Sea to Arab Sea, for, as it contended, "all the states dominating it are Arab".¹³⁴ Earlier on, Osman Sabbe had given free vent to similar idea in the

133. See Aaron S. Klieman, "Bab-el-Mandeb: The Red Sea in Transition", ORBIS, Fall, 1967, pp. 758-71, at p. 760.

134. See A.C.R., 1972/73, p. B142, quoting Al Ahram (Cairo) 20 October 1972; see, also, M. Abir, "Red Sea Politics", Adelphi Papers (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies), No. 93, December 1972 pp. 25-41.

following terms:

the imperialist factors in the Red Sea are the imperialist Zionists... Their aim is to exploit the Eritrean coast against the Arab nation and the Arab revolution... but the Eritrean revolution is on guard and is the guarantee that this will be corrected, until finally the Red Sea will become a purely Arab Sea.¹³⁵

For Israel, therefore, the exigency of preventing the Red Sea from becoming an Arab Lake placed increased premium on its alliance with Addis Ababa. For one thing, Ethiopia had control of the western shores of the sea from the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb to the boundary with Sudan. It also controls the mid-ocean archipelago of islands situated astride the main shipping lines from the Straits to the port of Eilat. Through its presence in Ethiopia, Israel could head-off the Arabs' "southern strategy" of blockade at the mouth of the Red Sea. Although this strategy had been described as being

135. Quoted in Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 69.

"manifestly inefficient",¹³⁶ the Arabs nonetheless tried it in 1973 during the Yom Kippur war.

In the aftermath of the war, however, Ethiopia went along with the OAU to cut diplomatic relations with Israel.¹³⁷ Despite the rupture in formal links, the relationship between the two continued with Israel, providing furtive assistance to the Ethiopian regime. Even after the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, Israeli military personnel remained as advisers to the Ethiopian forces. In 1975, about a dozen Israeli instructors were on hand to train the Ethiopian airborne division as well as the forces that subsequently constituted Mengistu's bodyguards.¹³⁸ Ethiopia also received spare parts (from Israel) for its US-supplied arms. This clandestine relationship went on unannounced until the lid was blown open on 6 February 1978 when the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan,

136. Tom J. Farer at the Hearings before the United States Senate, Committee in Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, pp. 70-71.

137. See A.C.R., 1973/74, p. B161.

138. See A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B210; also Makinda, Super Power Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa, op. cit. pp. 390-40.

disclosed in an interview in Zurich that his country had been selling arms to and had been in cooperation with Ethiopia "for years and years".¹³⁹ Although Addis Ababa dismissed this disclosure as a "deliberate and sinister act to isolate Ethiopia from the revolutionary and progressive Arab states", it was again subsequently confirmed by an opposition member of the Knesset who stated that Israeli advisers had been summarily expelled from Ethiopia shortly after Dayan's disclosure.¹⁴⁰

After getting over this temporary misunderstanding, ties between the two were soon resumed but, understandably, in a much more secretive form. Even though much of the earlier strategic rationale for its alliance with Ethiopia had become less persuasive, Israel could still use its presence in Ethiopia as a valuable spring-board for staging a diplomatic come-back to the African continent.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the idea of an independent

139. See Newsweek, February 13, 1978, p. 47.

140. Keessing's, May 26, 1978, p. 28992.

141. See "Israel's Ethiopian Comeback", Foreign Report (London), No. 20, January 1983, p. 5.

Eritrea remains; for Tel Aviv, an unpleasant prospect despite the fact that the rapprochement with Egypt had, to some extent, allayed some of its fears. In any case,

Israel still has cause to be worried because the hard-liners in the Arab camp remained as hostile as ever and have not conceded any issue in their conflict with the former. For instance, while Egypt was already exploring the possibilities of peace with Israel, a meeting of four Arab countries bordering the Red Sea was held at Taiz, North Yemen, in March 1977 and, in a joint communique, the participants emphasised the importance of Arab solidarity "vis-a-vis Israel's aggressive policy" and declared that their objective was to make the Red Sea a "Zone of Peace".¹⁴²

Consequently, rather than wane, the Israeli-Ethiopia relationship became even closer in the early 1980s. In autumn 1982, both parties resumed the exchange of intelligence, with the Israelis handing over to Addis Ababa Eritrean documents they had captured in Beirut.¹⁴³

142. Keessing's May 13, 1977, p. 28348.

143. Dan Connell, "Alignments in the Horn: Famine in the Deck", p. 29.

By the middle of the decade, this dealing had culminated in discrete consultations in military and political matters as well as extensive trade in non-military items.¹⁴⁴ An instance of this cooperation was in 1984 when Israel airlifted thousands of Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) from refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia itself. From all indications, the airlift, called Operation Moses was undertaken with the tacit permission of Addis Ababa and this drew the ire of Egypt and Sudan. Denouncing the operation Khartoum charged that it was a deal entered into by Ethiopia for military supplies and assistance from Israel - an allegation which Ethiopia dismissed as "malicious and mischievous".¹⁴⁵

Early in 1985, one report in the Washington Post claimed that Ethiopia had secretly invited back Israeli advisers to assist its army to combat the tide of armed insurgencies all over the country.¹⁴⁶ Another account had it that Israel had sold the Mengistu regime at least

144. Ibid. See, also, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia (Trenton, N. J.: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989), pp. 327-350.

145. On this "operation" and the furore it generated, see Keesing's, February, 1985, p. 3385, Africa Research Bulletin, February 15, 1985, pp. 7513-17, and, April 15, p. 7673.

146. See the issue of January 2, 1985.

\$20 million worth of Soviet-made arms and spares captured from Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

Certainly, the restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel on 3 November, 1989, has put paid to speculations about the relationship between the two. In fact, Israel, arms and advisers had steadily poured into Ethiopia, coming to a head in December 1989 when former US President, Jimmy Carter, charged that "one of our (American) Middle East allies" was supplying Mengistu's forces with cluster bombs.¹⁴⁸

Against the backdrop of developments in the military front in Ethiopia and the changes in the communist bloc, Addis Ababa may now need Israel much as, if not more than, the latter needs it. With the army virtually routed by Eritrean (and Tigrean) forces, and with the supply of arms from the traditional Eastern bloc sources drying up, Israel has clearly become the most handy friend in these trying times that the Mengistu regime has found itself. It is, therefore, easy to foresee an intensification of Israeli military involvement in the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict.

147. A.C.R., 1985/86, p. A170.

148. See Africa Research Bulletin, 26(11) December 15, 1989, p. 9502A, and The Middle East, No. 186, April 1990, pp. 18-19.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXTRA-REGIONAL ACTORS AND ERITREA

I The Super Powers

By its location, Eritrea offers immense attraction and has indeed been a focal point of interest to the world's major powers both in the past, and even more so, in contemporary times. Situated in the northeast corner of Africa, it occupies the strip of land along the western shore of the Red Sea stretching from the Sudanese border to the strait of Bab el Mandeb. The overall geostrategic significance of this area lies in its adjacent position to the Middle East and the Red Sea whose entrance it decisively commands. In addition, it is a key crossroad of air and sea routes which serve as passages for international communication and shipping. All maritime commerce (originating from Asia, East Africa and the Persian Gulf) heading for the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean must pass through the narrow strait of Bab el Mandeb.¹

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1. On the geopolitical importance of Eritrea's location, see Mordechai Abir, Oil, Power and Politics (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p. 119; also James E. Dougherty, The Horn of Africa: A Map of Political-Strategic Conflict (Washington D.C.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Inc., 1982), p. 2.

Thus, by itself, Eritrea possesses potent strategic magnet, and, viewed within the regional context of the Horn of Africa, it becomes every more alluring to outside powers. Despite this apparent geographical attraction, it has however been contended that the conception of the Horn as being strategically vital is obsolete because it derived from a moribund assessment of the Suez Canal and of the nature of warfare in the present age.² Nonetheless, extra-regional powers, particularly the superpowers, have continued to act in a manner that suggests that the Horn still retains some strategic value. This fact was amply demonstrated in the late 1970s when each superpower sought to gain or regain some measure of presence, if only to counteract the other's influence in the region. On the whole then, and as Marina Ottaway observed, "the strategic value of the area has become... a self-fulfilling prophecy".³

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2. See, for instance, Tom Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979), p. 162.
 3. Marina Ottaway, Soviet and American Influences in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 3.

Since the end of World War II, particularly at the height of the Cold War from the late 1940s to the 1960s, the overriding factor in superpower diplomacy in Eritrea and the Horn, (as in other places), has been the exigency of East-West rivalry which stemmed in part from geopolitical considerations as from ideological differences.⁴ Shortly after the war, the two superpowers became locked in an unregulated competition for influence across the globe with a view to re-shaping the post-war international order in terms of the competitive ideals of communism and capitalism championed by the USSR and the US respectively.⁵

In the process, both powers scrambled for military and strategic bases, friends and allies in a world increasingly polarised along ideological lines. It was in this context that the superpowers became directly involved in the struggle over Eritrea.

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4. For antecedents to superpower politics in the Horn, see Samuel Makinda, Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa (London: Croom Helm, 1987), Especially, pp. 5-12.
 5. On the Cold War, see D. F. Fleming, The Cold War and Its Origins, 1918-1960 (New York: Doubleday, 1961), and, Louis J. Halle, The Cold War as History (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

Initially, both superpowers appeared reticent about their involvement in the internal political conflicts in the Horn, particularly, the Eritrean question. According to Ottaway, this ostensibly hesitant posture was probably due to; (i) the high risks of entanglement of complex local disputes; (ii) extreme poverty and harsh climatic conditions in the area and, above all, (iii) the fact that the Horn was not an end in itself but an adjunct to larger objectives in the Middle East.⁶ Regardless, it was inevitable that the superpowers - having inched their way into the region - would be drawn into the Eritrean conflict. Indeed, given their vested ideological and strategic interests, there was really no way these global actors could be indifferent to conflicts whose outcome was bound to have implications for their positions in the region.

(a) The United States

American presence in Ethiopia dates back to 1903 when the two states established diplomatic relations.

6. Ottaway, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

During the Second World War, Ethiopia was one of the first countries to be freed from Italian occupation by the Allied forces and it was the first African state to join the United Nations. As a mark of gratitude for US support for Ethiopia's freedom and his rehabilitation to the throne, the Ethiopian monarch provided plot of land adjacent to the royal palace for the US embassy.⁷

Although American officials often point to these symbolic ties as the source of the "special fascination" which Ethiopia held for them, the real issue has since been the geopolitical advantage to be derived from Ethiopia especially with Eritrea as part of it.⁸

In the thick of the World War II, the US had gradually inched its way into Eritrea which from 1914

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7. See United States Senate, Sub-Committee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Washington D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 62.
 8. On US-Ethiopia ties, See J. H. Spencer, Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa and US Policy (Cambridge, Ma: Institute for Foreign Affairs Analysis, 1977).

was being administered by a provisional British authority. First, the US opened a consulate in the colony and constructed a base for repairing submarines and ships as well as an aircrafts assembly plant at Gura. In 1942, its army signals corps took over Radio Marina - a British-operated communications facility on the outskirts of the Eritrean capital. This facility served as a relay station for messages to and from war ships. It was also a key component of the United States world-wide intelligence network linked to the Defence Department in Washington. Far back then, American personnel in Eritrea included 77 officers, 259 men and over two thousand civilians working on military related projects.⁹

As the war drew to a close, the United States hegemonic designs for Europe and the entire global system had come into bold relief. Its objectives in this regard were however masked and packaged under the

9. See G.K.N. Trevaski, *op. cit.*, p. 37; and Harold G. Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974: The Politics of Empire (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 12.

programme for rehabilitation and reconstruction in Europe as well as commitment to anti-colonialism and self-determination in the colonial territories. As it turned out, American interests in this regard coincided with the British plan - having been exhausted by the war - to brace its colonial empire where Anglo-American objectives corresponded such as in the Arabian peninsula and the Horn of Africa.¹⁰ It was in this context that Ethiopia became caught up in and became "a classic case of the historic shift" in world power from Britain to the United States.¹¹

At about this time, too, Emperor Haile Selassie had renewed moves to have Eritrea under Ethiopian sovereignty, arguing that the return of the colony (to Ethiopia) was "simply the rectification of a wrong which for sixty years deprived Ethiopia of the oldest part of the empire and ... of access to the sea".¹²

10. See William Roger Louis, "The Special Relationship and British Decolonisation: American anti-colonialism and the dissolution of the British Empire", International Affairs 61(3), Summer 1985, pp. 395-420.

11. Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, p. 2.

12. Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Press and Information Department, Eritrea and Ben adir (Addis Ababa: 1945), p. 4.

To this end, he made several overtures to the United States and exploited Washington's initial suspicions about UK's designs for Eritrea and the Horn in general.¹³

By 1942, the Emperor had begun to actively cultivate the US, soliciting American investment in oil exploration, aviation and equipment for the fledging Ethiopian army. This initial entreaty resulted in a Mutual Aid Agreement in 1943 under which the United States pledged "to supply such articles, services, and information... for the defense of Ethiopia ... and, ... to render all practical assistance in the rehabilitation of the country".¹⁴ By this agreement and other subsequent overtures, Selassie sought to concretely link his country's economy, security and, most especially, his territorial claims over Eritrea to the budding American interest in Ethiopia.¹⁵ In one of his numerous supplications to President Truman, the Emperor wrote that:

13. See the testimony by J. H. Spencer before the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, especially pp. 21-25.

14. Marcus, op. cit., p. 21.

15. John H. Spencer, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa and US Policy, pp. 13-15.

unless we can obtain access to the sea, the possibility of developing the oil concession which we have granted to a large American corporation and which holds forth unlimited possibilities for the alleviation of the hard lot of our beloved subjects, must also vanish.¹⁶

In 1945 when Selassie visited President Roosevelt at Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal (on the latter's way back from the Yalta conference), he again put forward his claims to Eritrea and sought the President's help in realising his objective. Thereafter, at the Paris Peace Conference as well as in the United Nations in 1946, the Ethiopian ruler repeated his claims and tried to get the US and the other western powers to endorse his claims.¹⁷

Although the US was all along receptive to Selassie's entreaties, domestic and external considerations made it waver in endorsing Ethiopia's claims to Eritrea. At the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944, for instance, President Roosevelt had canvassed,

16. Quoted in Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, p. 80.

17. See the accounts by Bereket Habte Selassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation", in Basil Davidson et al., Behind the War in Eritrea, pp. 37-38.

in a memorandum to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, that all or a part of Eritrea be handed over to the Ethiopian government.¹⁸ However, by 1946, Washington had shifted from this position and insisted, at the Paris Peace Conference, that Eritrea should become independent after ten years of British trusteeship.¹⁹ Again, with an eye to ethnic (Italian) vote in the upcoming presidential elections, and with a view to forestalling communist victory in the then equally imminent Italian elections, the Truman administration briefly toyed with the idea of putting Eritrea back under Italian rule with guarantees for Ethiopian access to the sea.²⁰

By 1950, the Italian and American elections were over thus making it easier for Washington to take a decisive position on the Eritrean issue. As well, a clearer picture of mutuality of interests between Addis Ababa and Washington had begun to emerge. During the Korean

18. Marcus, op. cit., p. 39.

19. Tekie Fessehazion, "The International Dimension of the Eritrean Question", p. 10.

20. See United States, Senate, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, p. 25.

war for example, Ethiopia sided with the West by sending a battalion of the Imperial Bodyguard to fight in the US-sponsored operation.²¹

When the debate on the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea took place, it was within a climate permeated by the exigencies of the Korean war and an ascendant American strategic hegemony. Prior to the outbreak of the war, US officials had harped consistently on the strategic importance of Eritrea and emphasised the imperative of having the area under control. A memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, canvassed that:

the benefits now resulting from operation of our telecommunications center at Asmara... can be obtained from no other location in the entire Middle East - Eastern Mediterranean area. Therefore US rights in Eritrea should not be compromised.²²

The "rights" being canvassed then included port concessions, communications facility, air and naval

21. See Negussay Ayele, "The Foreign Policy of Ethiopia", in Gladie Aluko, The Foreign Policy of Africa States, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p. 58.

22. Marcus, op. cit., p. 84.

bases.²³ In its approach to the Eritrean question therefore, the prime objective of the US was the mutual satisfaction of its strategic interests and that of its client, Ethiopia. Washington had indeed become fully wedded to the idea of Ethiopian sovereignty over Eritrea as a quid pro quo for strategic rights in the Red Sea area.²⁴

In advance of the UN resolution of 1950, the US had indicated that once Ethiopia's claims over Eritrea were upheld, it would press for guarantees of access to the extensive communications facility in Asmara named Kagnew after the Ethiopian contingent to Korea. Testifying before the House Subcommittee in 1976, Spencer explained why Washington placed so much premium on the facility:

23. See Appendix VI for the memorandum (of December 1948) by James Forrestal to the Secretary of State.

24. See Hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, p. 26.

... it was located far from the north and south magnetic poles, the aurova borealis and magnetic storms in a zone where the limited degree of seasonal variations between sunrise and sunset reduced the need for numerous frequency changes. It was, therefore, important to the world-wide network of US communications through the Philippines, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Arlington, Virginia, and important as well for NATO communications within Western Europe itself when electrical and magnetic disturbances upset communications in those higher latitudes. In other words, the base at Asmara had little to do with either Ethiopia or Africa.²⁵

As the UN geared towards a decision on Eritrea, Ethiopia's Aklilu Habtewold and Secretary of State, Dean Acheson negotiated the agreement by which Addis Ababa granted the United States base rights over Kagnew in return for military assistance. With this assured strategic stake, the US pushed the federal proposal and mounted an intense diplomatic campaign for its approval by the General Assembly. Even though Washington acknowledged that the Eritreans' case (for independence) deserved consideration, its overriding strategic interest dictated otherwise. As the then Secretary of State, John Forster Dulles, admitted:

25. ibid., p. 26.

From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interest of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.²⁶

Once the federation arrangement was sealed, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia began to pressurise Washington for military assistance. To this end, the Emperor made several overtures to American officials and stressed Ethiopia's long-standing affinity with the US. Addressing a joint session of Congress on one occasion, Selassie declared his preparedness to move Ethiopia to "the closest possible association to the United States" and further enthused that:

We (Ethiopians) have a profound orientation to the West... We read the same Bible. We speak a common spiritual tongue.²⁷

Apart from Selassie's overtures, other developments in the Middle East tended to favour a close relationship

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26. quoted in Linda Heinden, "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence", Monthly Review, 30 (2), June 1978, p. 15.
27. Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Information, "Address to the United States Congress (26 May 1954)" in Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 1918-1967 (Addis Ababa: 1967), p. 109.

between the US and Ethiopia. With an increasingly radicalised Egypt under Nasser, and the lurking spectre of Soviet pressures in the eastern Mediterranean, Washington became quite sensitive to its strategic stakes in the Middle East (and Red Sea) area and to the security of the newly independent Israel.²⁸ In the circumstance, US officials were very receptive to Ethiopia's entreaties, and pressed for extensive rights over the communications facilities in Ethiopia.

Thus, on 22 May 1953, Washington and Addis Ababa signed two crucial 25-year agreements. One was the "Utilisation of Defence Installations within the Empire of Ethiopia", alias "Kagnew Communications Base Agreement", while the other was the "Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement" which guaranteed American military assistance to Ethiopia. By these agreements, the US was able to expand and use the Kagnew base as a primary relay station for its army's strategic communications system.

28. See John Spanier, American Foreign Policy Since World War II, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), pp. 115-127.

and as a major naval communications center. It further served as an earth terminal for its satellite system as well as a diplomatic communications relay point. In return for these extensive base rights, the US, in 1953, sent a large contingent of the Military Assistance Advisory Group to assist the Ethiopian army.²⁹

Also, as Washington sought to combat perceived communist menace in the Middle East, Ethiopia became further linked to American security concerns. Under the Eisenhower Doctrine, Ethiopia was penned down as a component of a secondary line of defence against communist subversion in the region. This "Southern tier" was envisaged as a corollary to the "Northern Tier" concept which culminated in the Bagdad Pact of 1956 and the formation of the Middle East Treaty Organisation (METO).³⁰

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29. United States Senate, Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Ethiopia, Hearings, 91st Congress, 2nd Session, June 1, 1970 (Washington D.C.: USGPO, 197), at p. 1882.
30. The METO, comprising Britain, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan was conceived as an extension of NATO's line of defence against communism. For more details, see Spanier, American Foreign Policy Since World War II, especially pp. 115-137.

During his visit to Addis Ababa in March 1957, Vice President Nixon talked about Ethiopia's "great stake" in the Eisenhower Doctrine and negotiated for the establishment of an Air Force Communications Centre as well as access to the anchorage at Massawa, the strategic Red Sea port. As usual, the Emperor did not fail to perceive then an opportunity for a quid pro quo and indeed stressed the need for greater American military aid. When James Richards, Special Assistant to Eisenhower on Middle East Affairs, subsequently visited Addis Ababa in April, the Imperial government again expressed its cordial support for the doctrine and emphasised the imperative of close collaboration in resisting the threat of international communism.³¹

Another crucial development in the evolving Washinton-Addis Ababa alliance was a secret agreement signed in 1960 committing the United States to train

31. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, May 18-23, 1957, p. 15553.

and equip a 40,000-man Ethiopian army in return for further expansion of the Kagnev base. Under this pact, Washington further renewed its continuing interest in the security and territorial integrity of Ethiopia.³² Directly or otherwise, this commitment, as the earlier ones, linked the US to Ethiopia's efforts at containing the Eritrean struggle.

During the ill-fated Ethiopia-Eritrean federation, American officials in Asmara made frequent reports to the State Department about Addis Ababa's erosion of Eritrean autonomy. In 1952 for example, Edward Mulchahy, the first American consul in Asmara observed in a secret dispatch to Washington that Addis Ababa was trying hard to make the federation look much like annexation.³³ Not only did Washington fail to apprehend Selassie's encroachment on Eritrea's autonomy, it actually turned a blind eye on Ethiopia's nullification of the federal arrangement. Indeed, by the time Eritrea was eventually annexed in 1962, the US had become even more deeply involved in Ethiopia

32. Africa Contemporary Record, 1970/71, p. B100.

33. See Tekie Fessehazion, "The International Dimension of the Eritrean Question", p. 17.

due, in part, to Somalia's irredentist threats, as well as to the exigency of helping Selassie contain the emergent Eritrean liberation movement. In 1963 and 1964, more military aid agreements were signed with Ethiopia receiving additional military assistance including shipment of relatively sophisticated arms including a squadron of F-5A jet fighters.³⁵ Apart from arms and amunitions, Washington also provided several counter-insurgency experts to work with Ethiopia units under an arrangement tagged "Plan Delta". By fiscal 1970, American military aid to Ethiopia totaled close to \$147.1 million - accounting for half of its total military assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa during the period between 1953 and 1970.³⁶

Thus, throughout the 1960s, the effective function-
int of the Ethiopian army depended totally on the
continued supply of American military assistance.

34. Earle J. Richey, American Consul, to the State Department, Foreign Service Dispatch, 775.00/6-2959. Quoted in Ibid.

35. See Fred Halliday, "US Policy in the Horn: Aboulia or Proxy Intervention", Review of Africa Political Economy No. 10, September/December 1977, p. 10.

36. US Senate, United States Security Agreement, and Commitments Abroad, pp. 1935-7.

In the process, US military commitments inevitably made it a prime actor in Ethiopia's internal politics, particularly in the Eritrean conflict. The extent of its involvement in this conflict later became quite contentious and featured prominently in debates within the foreign relations committees of both Senate and the House of Representatives.

On June 1 1970, a State Department official, George Bader, under questioning before the Senate Sub Committee on US Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, admitted that the United States "was supplying bombs and ammunition which are being used by the military forces of Ethiopia against an internal insurgency".³⁷ Also ~~testifying~~ testifying subsequently before a House Sub-Committee, Congressman Henry Reuss contended that the:

use of American equipment by the central government against the rebels has already had the effect of identifying the United States with the repressive policies of the central government.³⁸

37. United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Ethiopia, op. cit.

38. US Senate, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, p. 58.

Although the then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, David Newsom, had tried to assure the Senate Sub-Committee in June 1970 that US military commitment was not tantamount to involvement in internal security problems of Ethiopia, it had become increasingly clear that American presence in that country was placing it right in the eye of the storm.

The uneasiness about the potential for further American entanglement was heightened by the explosiveness of the Eritrean conflict especially as it assumed a discernible anti-American dimension.³⁹ This trend was vividly dramatised in one incident on January 11, 1971, when a US Army mail courier was fatally shot with a Russian AK-47 or SKS rifle.⁴⁰ Although investigations failed to disclose the exact identity of the assailants, the attack nonetheless fuelled anxiety in Washington that the ELF might be switching on to new campaigns targeted at American personnel and

39. See Robert A. Diamond and David Fouquet, "American Military Aid to Ethiopia and Eritrean Insurgency", Africa Today 19, Winter 1972, pp. 37-43.

40. Ibid., p. 38.

facilities at the Kagnev center. Before long, this fear was confirmed by a series of anti-American operations launched by the insurgents.

In one incident on July 14, 1975, the ELF kidnapped two American officials, Jim Harrell and Steve Campbell. Also, on September 12, two other Americans were seized by the guerrilla forces from the US Navy communications site at Gura, near Asmara. One more American was held hostage on December 26 and an ELF spokesman in Baghdad threatened that those held captive would be shot unless the US agreed to end all aid to Ethiopia and dismantle the base allegedly being built at Massawa.⁴¹ Reacting to the entreaty of US Congressman Reuss (on behalf of the hostages) the Eritrean nationalist, Osman Sabbe admitted thus:

In kidnapping the two Americans and others, our fighters were intending to react against American involvement which exhibits itself daily in the arms the Ethiopians are using to destroy Eritrean lives and properties indiscriminately.⁴²

41. A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B199.

42. US Senate, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, p. 62.

Besides this anti-American turn in the Eritrean struggle, another development which would have implications for US role in Ethiopia was the decision in December 1970 by the British and American governments to jointly construct a communications and anchorage facility on the Chagos Islands of Diego Garcia. Because of its location, this Indian Ocean base offered long-term political and strategic advantages over the Kagnew base. For one thing, it was situated on a trouble-free British territory and, as such, was not vulnerable to the political volatility associated with Eritrea. Moreover, development in earth satellites had rendered the tropical system of radio communication on which Kagnew was built obsolete.⁴³

Consequently, and with the growing political instability in Ethiopia, fuelled, largely, by the Eritrean and other provincial revolts, the United States used the ~~redundance~~ of Kagnew as a convenient

43. See A.C.R., 1973/74, p. B161.

protext to scale down its presence in the country.

The decision to phase out Kagnev was taken by President Nixon in August 1973, and on this note, the dominant rationale for the special relationship with, and military assistance to, Ethiopia was removed.

Almost at once, Ethiopia had become consigned to the outer perimeter of American strategic and security concerns. In fact, when Emperor Haile Selassie presented a \$450 million arms request during his visit to Washington in 1973, he was politely rebuffed.⁴⁴

All the same, and despite the overthrow of Selassie in the 1974 revolution, the US adopted a cautious posture and decidedly refrained from taking any step that might imperil its relationship with Addis Ababa. On the question of whether to continue arms sales to Ethiopia, the State Department maintained in a memorandum that:

44. Ibid.

As long as there exists a distinct possibility that the present situation will result in a strengthened, more moderate state, and in a continuation of the traditional Ethiopian ties with the West, we should continue to carry out our programme of military aid and sales as agreed. Suspension of these shipments would only strengthen the hands of radical elements among the military and further frustrate the moderates, perhaps leading them to concur in more radical initiatives.⁴⁵

Even when the PMAC adopted socialism in December that year, official reckoning in Washington was that moderation would ultimately prevail and that the junta was only manifesting the usually transitory "African trait closer to Nyerere's African socialism than to Marxism-Leninism". At several meetings with the Dergue, US officials expressed determination to live with the changes and, on one occasion, applauded the new regime's "progressive economic and social goals".⁴⁶

45. "The Horn: Ethiopia and Somalia", paper jointly written by the Bureau of African Affairs and the Policy of Planning Staff. Quoted in Donald Petterson, "Ethiopia abandoned? An American Perspective", International Affairs 62 (4) Autumn 1986, pp. 627-645, at p. 630.

46. Ibid., p. 632.

In the wake of renewed fighting between Eritrean and Ethiopian forces early in 1975, the United States continued its military assistance to the latter despite press reports (in the US) of widespread atrocities being committed by the new regime.⁴⁷ Although its officials acknowledged that the Ethiopian "bombed villages indiscriminately and executed many suspected insurgents", the State Department advised "patience, restraint and continued military aid to Ethiopia".⁴⁸ Throughout 1974 and 1975, the military aid relationship was kept going through arms sales, grants and activities of the MAAG group.

On its part, in spite of the incessant strictures against imperialism, the Dergue also looked to the US for urgent military assistance to contain the Eritrean insurgency.⁴⁹ Out of its shopping list of \$30 million, Washington only agreed to sell arms worth \$7 million

47. See David Korn, Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 639.

48. Petterson, Ethiopia abandoned?, p. 630.

49. A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B205.

and, even then, deliberately stalled over the delivery.⁵⁰ This meagre response and delay in making the shipment infuriated the Dergue. Unknown to the junta, perhaps, was that was beginning to perceive situation in, and its relationship with, Ethiopia with increasing reservation. As David Korn, former American Charge d'Affairs in Addis Ababa explained:

Despite the effort by the State Department to put a good face on things, overall the administration was beginning to view Ethiopia with considerable reserve. The Ethiopian government was clearly no longer an ally or even a friend of the United States. The shipment of large amounts of ammunition could lead, it was feared, to more involvement than the US Congress or public would tolerate at a time when the lesson being drawn from the United States' experience in Vietnam was that all foreign military involvement was to be avoided.⁵¹

A major cause of this apprehension was the Eritrean war which had, by then, become a subject of public concern particularly in the Congress. The

50. Korn, Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union, p. 14.

51. Ibid., p. 15.

administration then felt that further military cooperation with Ethiopia could lead to unnecessary entanglement and draw adverse reactions from the Arabs. Yet, it was feared that American personnel in Eritrea might be endangered and access to the strategic coastline jeopardised were the insurgents to succeed in breaking away from Ethiopia.⁵²

Regardless, the US went ahead with its military commitments and in April 1976, Secretary of States, Henry Kissinger approved the provision of two squadrons of F-5E fighter bombers and agreed to consider a further request for military supplies worth about \$100 million.⁵³

This cooperation with the Ethiopian junta however put the Ford administration under pressure from the Congress and the media. Defending the official position, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs,

52. Donald Petterson, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and American ambassador to Somalia, 1978-82, has adequately testified to these constraints on Washington's responses then. See his "Ethiopia abandoned?", op. cit., p. 633.

53. Legum (ed.), A.C.R. 1976/77, p. B11.

William Shaufele, deposed before the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee in August that:

We believe we would incur much criticism from our friends in Africa and elsewhere were we to withdraw support from the Ethiopian Government during this time of difficulty. Such a move would also be attributed to distaste for Ethiopia's brand of socialism.⁵⁴

Obviously, the State Department was trying to put a good face on a clearly uneasy and increasingly unjustifiable relationship with Addis Ababa. At a time it had just been smitten by the "loss" of Angola to a Marxist regime and the attendant criticism from conservative circles in Washington, the administration was naturally not eager to admit in an election year that yet another African state, particularly a long-standing client, had been lost to the Soviets. Answering the question by Subcommittee Chairman, Senator Dick Clark, on whether the Ethiopian government was "Marxist, Socialist oriented or strongly

54. United States Senate, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, p. 114.

anti-United States", Shaufele's responded that ... despite its sometimes inconsistent attitudes", the Dergue was not "basically anti-United States":

...., certainly in the press there are attacks on the United States, but by and large, the government, although it is attempting to set up some kind of a leftist or socialist system in Ethiopia, however unfocused or disorganized it may be, is not systematically or instinctively anti-United States.⁵⁵

Again, in response to fears being expressed over human rights abuses by the Dergue, Shaufele apologetically remarked that such violations are not "so serious as that" to warrant severance of military aid to the regime.⁵⁶ Even as the junta's stance became clearly anti-American, the Africanists within the Carter administration such as the then Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, continued to advocate the need "to retain presence and as much influence" as the US could in the country⁵⁷ - a position which eventually

55. Ibid., p. 123.

56. Ibid., p. 126.

57. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 72.

prevailed over the Globalists' who saw Ethiopia as a "lost case" and accordingly pressed for hostile measures against it.⁵⁸

Washington's position then was largely a reflection of President Carter's preference for an idealistic approach to foreign policy and his bid to de-emphasise militarism and East-West rivalry as the central concerns of American foreign relations.⁵⁹

Thus, notwithstanding the increasing radicalisation of the Addis Ababa regime and its human rights abuses, the White House was reluctant to take any step that was likely to antagonise the PMAC - in the "forlorn hope" that it could retain presence and that moderation would ultimately prevail in Ethiopia.⁶⁰

58. On the debate between the Africanists and the Globalists in relation to the Horn, See William G. Hyland, "US Policy options (in the Horn)", The Washington Review of Strategic and International Studies (Washington D.C.: Center For International and Strategic Studies), May 1978, pp. 23-30.

59. See Phil Williams, "The Limits of America Power: From Nixon to Reagan", International Affairs, 63(4), Autumn 1987, pp. 575-587.

60. See Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn, p. 10.

By this time however, the Dergue, intent on establishing its socialist credentials, was no longer comfortable with its dependence on the US and this issue was one of the major factors that precipitated the violent division within the ruling body. As soon as Mengistu took over the reins of power - moving the revolution on a clear pro-Moscow path - the uneasy relationship with Washington became further troubled.

The first reaction of the US to this development came on February 24 when Secretary Vance told a Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Operations that military aid to Argentina, Uruguay and Ethiopia would be reduced because of human rights violation.⁶¹ About two months later, Addis Ababa, in a climax to series of anti-American activities and structures, ordered the immediate closure of Kagnev base, MAAG and USIS offices, American consulate in Asmara and the Naval medical research centre.⁶² By this move, Mengistu, signalled the end to decades of association between the two countries.

61. A.C.R., 1976/77, p. B210.

62. Ibid.

Although Washington retaliated by cutting of arms supplies to the regime and making overtures to Somalia, still, it did not completely give up on, and, in fact kept open the possibility of recouping its loss in Ethiopia. The rationale for this posture, as David Korn explains, was that "Ethiopia was simply too big and important to write off, no matter what gains might be anticipated from Somalia".⁶³

The other option available then, apart from the Somali card, was to support the Eritrean movement but, this was completely out of the consideration. Rather, a Presidential emissary, David Aaron, Deputy National Security Adviser, sent for talks with Mengistu in 1978 reiterated that the US had never supported "the insurgencies in Eritrea and had no reservation in endorsing, as it always had, Ethiopia's territorial integrity".⁶⁴

In the aftermath of Aaron's mission, relations had in fact temporarily improved resulting in the delivery

63. Korn, Ethiopia, The United States and the Soviet Union, p. 48.

64. Ibid., p. 50.

of some military spare parts and trucks and the appointment of an ambassador to Ethiopia. It did not take long for this initially promising rapprochement to collapse due, in part to Washington's insistence on compensation for the properties of American citizens expropriated in the wake of the revolution, and, in the main, to an increasingly pro-Soviet inclination on the part of Mengistu. At any rate, towards the end of its term of office, the Carter presidency had become bogged down with the Iran hostage crisis and, its re-election campaigns. As a result, it became resigned to the futility of trying to win Ethiopia back.⁶⁵

The succeeding Reagan administration came into office with a fixed set of assumptions about the world and America's place in it. The "Reagan Doctrine" springs from the anxieties in conservative circles over the loss of US hegemony, the spread of communism, and Soviet geo-political advances in the Third World. In real terms, it encapsulated an aggressive strategy of

65. Ibid.

counter-revolution not merely to contain communism, but, to intimidate and possibly overthrow radical anti-imperialist regimes in the Third World through military and economic pressures.⁶⁶

Viewed in this context, then, Ethiopia represented a model of everything Reagan detested. Not only did it profess Marxian-Leninism, it also stood out, or, at least, was perceived as a prominent Soviet client - with a visible East-bloc presence on its territory. Worse still, it shared borders with Somalia, Sudan and Kenya, the three states in which the United States was cultivating interest.

All the same, and, despite its misgivings about the Dergue, the Reagan government was initially undecided on how exactly to deal with Mengistu. While some official advocated a distinctly hostile policy - including sanctions and assistance to opponents of

66. On the Reagan Doctrine, see Jeff McMahan, Reagan and the World: Imperial Policy in the New Cold War (London: Pluto Press, 1985); Stanley Hoffman, Dead Ends: American Foreign Policy in the New Cold War (Cambridge, Ma: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1983); and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick et al. The Reagan Doctrine and US Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1985).

the regime - others were inclined toward a moderate line and proposed dialogue with a view to patching up relations. At the end of the day, both viewpoints were to shape the Reagan administration's policy towards Ethiopia.⁶⁷

While it made discrete moves aimed at improving relations, the administration also supplied covert aid to some forces opposed to the Mengistu regime such as the Ethiopian People's Democratic Alliance. In 1986, there were reports that the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) was aiding Ethiopian insurgents to the tune of \$500,000 annually. From all indications, this covert support was a component of the anti-communist operation and was reportedly being coordinated with Saudi Arabia.⁶⁸ Although it collaborated with relief organisations affiliated with the Eritrean movement, there were no direct links with the EPLF forces whom a State Department official once dismissed as being "as Marxist-Leninist

67. On the evolution of Reagan's policy toward Ethiopia, see Korn, Ethiopia, especially, pp. 56-60.

68. See Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. 33, No. 9, September 1987, p. 35369; and Bob Woodward, Veil: The Secret Wars of the C.I.A. 1981-1987 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 352-385.

as the Ethiopians".⁶⁹ Eritreans themselves have long learnt not to expect that Washington would abandon Ethiopia in support of Eritrean independence. As Ermias Debessai, a member of the EPLF's Central Committee readily admits:

... The US essentially believes that Ethio-Soviet relations will not be durable; that Ethiopia will revert to the West. So better support Ethiopia than a liberation struggle that is bound to be solidly independent of U.S. influences.⁷⁰

In any case, support for the Eritreans - especially the EPLF - would have ^{run} counter to the overall objective of the Reagan doctrine. Despite its intense dislike for the Dergue, the Reagan

69. Quoted in Dan Connell, "Alignments in the Horn, Famine in the Deck", op. cit., p. 30. Contrary to the speculation by some observers that the EPLF has become a conservative force representing American opposition to the Dergue, Woodward and Connell made it clear that US covert aid was channelled mainly to the right-wing and moderate forces opposed to Mengistu rather than to the Marxist-inclined EPLF. In fact, former Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Affairs, Chester Crocker had once dismissed the EPLF as Marxists when he remarked, even if half in jest, that it was ironic that "capitalists should be asked to mediate between two sets of Marxists". See Crocker's statement in connection with the peace talks between the EPLF and the Ethiopian government in New African July 1989, p. 12.

70. Personal communication with Ermias Debessai, March 8, 1989.

administration, like the ones before it, consistently espoused support for Ethiopia's territorial integrity and urged Eritreans to settle for regional autonomy.⁷¹ This continuity in U.S. position vis-a-vis the Eritrean question was still a reflection of the "florhorn hope" that as anti-Sovietism and frustration set in, Ethiopia would ultimately be weaned away from the communist path. Donald Patterson, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State has summed it up this way:

In the context ... of present and probably future political and military factors, a better relationship between the United States and Ethiopia is not out of question... If and when conditions are more favourable for change, a common basis of interest could provide the basis for a better relationship between the United States and Ethiopia.⁷²

As a matter of fact, relations between the two states are indeed beginning to thaw. In August 1989, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs,

71. See Chester Crocker, "U.S. Interests in Regional Conflicts in the Horn of Africa", Current Policy, No. 764, (Washington, D.C., United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs), November 1985, p. 5.

72. Patterson, "Ethiopia abandoned? An American Perspective", p. 643.

Herman Cohen, visited Ethiopia and held extensive talks with President Mengistu. During the talks, he expressed support for the peace plan announced by the government in June that year, and stated that the "U.S. continues to believe Ethiopia's unity should be respected and strengthened".⁷³

Cohen's visit was significant because it was the first by a high-ranking American official in fifteen years. It also confirmed Ethiopia's preparedness to accept US involvement in the peace initiative being put together by former President Jimmy Carter. Above all, it showed that Washington would rather wait for better relations with Ethiopia than support the Eritreans who have historically been hostile to its interests. A united Ethiopia - larger and more populous - is definitely more preferable as ally to Eritrea. Given the long years of friendship with the imperial regime, Washington could still count on pro-Western elements in the country. Moreover, Addis Ababa remains the region's main diplomatic centre - hosting

73. National Concord (Lagos), August 7, 1989, p. 10.

the OAU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Nonetheless, the U.S. has also shown a new-found inclination to give the Eritreans a sympathetic hearing even if it continues to endorse Ethiopia's territorial integrity. An EPLF source admitted that there are "indications now.... that their (U.S.) position is undergoing positive changes".⁷⁴ For their part, too, the insurgents have mellowed their usually strident anti-American rhetoric but still refer to the "historic injustice" done to the Eritrean people and the role of the U.S. in the U.N. in the 1950. For once, both sides have realised the expediency of warming up to each other. The Eritreans certainly need to cultivate a more sympathetic opinion abroad and the United States has been a prime target of the recent diplomatic blitz aimed at breaking out of isolation. Although Washington has been in contact with the Eritreans with a view to promoting negotiation, it, however, reserves

74. Personal Communication with Yemane G. Meskel, EPLF's Director of Information (European Office), April 1990.

an abiding faith in the prospect of better relations with Ethiopia.⁷⁵

(b) The USSR

Soviet interest in the Red Sea region dates far back in time. In the 17th century, Ethiopia had been a focal point of Russian interest, culminating in an attempt to unify the Russian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches and a nominal alignment forged to countervail the Ottoman empire.⁷⁶

Up till 1917, Czarist attraction to Ethiopia derived not only from affinities of orthodox christianity, but, more importantly, from the possibilities of extending Russian influence in the Southern Red Sea. A famous Czar, Peter the Great, had insisted that the potency of Russia's naval power depended on its access to "warm water ports" in the south and on opening up direct routes to the lucrative trade of India.⁷⁷ In

75. See New African, July 1969, pp. 11-13.

76. See Czeslaw Jesman, The Russians in Ethiopia (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), especially, pp. 37-60; H.G. Marcus, The Life and Time of Menelik II, op. cit., pp. 115-116; and Edward T. Wilson, Russia and Black Africa Before World II (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1974).

77. See Wilson, Russia and Black Africa Before World War II.

the 1880s, a correspondent of Moskovia Vedemosti observed, rather futuristically, that a "reawakened Abyssinia could become a watchman for the southern gates"⁷⁸ of the Red Sea. Indeed, Russia had subsequently established diplomatic relations with Ethiopia in 1895.

The USSR's involvement in Ethiopia has historically been impelled by a distinct strategic imperative - to secure facilities around the Red Sea coast in anticipation of its emergence as a maritime power and to mitigate the disadvantage of distance in communication between the Baltic and the Far East. Writing on antecedents to Soviet policies in Africa, Edward Wilson has observed:

... most of the basic motivations that guide Soviet involvement were discernible in much earlier Russian activity. Then, as of now, there was a strong desire to take advantage of local unrest to steer African developments in directions deemed compatible with Russia's global interests. Perhaps even more powerful was the ambition to thwart the designs and curtail the influence of western nations on the continent. And finally, there was an important strategic incentive to find facilities on African shores...⁷⁹

78. Quoted in Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa, p. 10.

79. Edward T. Wilson, "Russia's Historic Stake in Black Africa", in David E. Albright (ed.), Africa and International Communism (London: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 67-92, at pp. 67-68.

Although contacts between Moscow and Addis Ababa date from the Second World War, these did not deter the USSR from opposing the union of the former Italian colony of Eritrea with the imperial Ethiopia. Under the auspices of the Four-Power Commission, the Soviet Union advocated that Eritrea be handed back in trusteeship to Italy. At the Lancaster House Conference in 1948, the Soviet delegate declared:

The Soviet delegation has studied very carefully and closely this question and having in mind the great progress and extensive work which has been done by the Italian government in this colony during their administration as to industry and agriculture, and having also in mind the enormous work carried out in connection with transport in this colony, and bearing in mind the statement made publicly by the Italian spokesman that the Italian government would do its best to improve the standard of living and well being of the Eritrean population, the Soviet delegation considers that Eritrea be given under the trusteeship of Italy for a definite and acceptable period of time.⁸⁰

A year later, at the General Assembly in November 1949, the Soviets had changed their position and proposed:

80. Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies), Former Italian Colonies. Minutes of Meetings, (Lancaster House, London, 1948).

outright independence for Eritrea. This turn-about in position was largely an indication of its disappointment at Rome's decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and had little to do with a sudden awareness of the merit of the Eritrean case for self-determination. Far back then, the twists in Soviet posture on Eritrea had revealed the overriding leitmotif of its policy which was the advancement of geopolitical objectives regardless of the ideological exhortations with which they were couched.

During the debate on Eritrea at the General Assembly, the USSR first submitted a draft resolution (A/AC-36/L.31) proposing immediate independence for Eritrea; withdrawal of British forces within three months of the day this decision would be adopted; and that Ethiopia be ceded that part of the colony which was necessary to secure its (Ethiopian) access to the sea through the port of Assab.⁸¹ It later modified this proposal to call for outright independence for Eritrea.

81. See Year Book of the United Nations, 1950 (New York: Columbia University Press in Cooperation with the United Nations, 1951), p. 364.

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Addressing the General Assembly in 1950,

Ambassador Vishinsky declared:

The colonial system is going through an acute crisis. Accordingly, in considering the fate of Eritrea... the UN must take a decision which will satisfy the longing of the Eritrean people for independence and freedom from national oppression. The General Assembly cannot tolerate a deal by colonial powers at the expense of the population of Eritrea. In the circumstances, the only just solution... is to grant independence.⁸²

Having failed to get its recommendation adopted, the Soviet Union vehemently opposed the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia and described the federal arrangement as a "marriage against the will of one of the parties".⁸³

In spite of this opposition to Ethiopia's claims over Eritrea, the Kremlin still maintained some contacts with the imperial regime to the extent that Selassie's close relations with the US permitted. In fact toward the

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., p. 367.

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late 1950s, Moscow became a willing target of the Emperor's instinctive drives to diversify his foreign relations in the traditional style of playing off foreign powers, specifically, as a means of gaining some bargaining leverage to pressurise the United States for more arms. It was in this connection that Selassie paid an elaborate visit to the Soviet Union in June 1959 and got a generous long-term and low interest loan of \$109 million for the development of industry, agriculture and other projects. The Ethiopian monarch also got a personal gift of an Ilyushin-14 aircraft from the Kremlin.⁸⁴

Furthermore, an agreement providing for Soviet economic and technical aid to Ethiopia was signed and, as part of the deal, Moscow undertook to construct an oil refinery in the Eritrean port city of Assab.⁸⁵

This was followed in 1961 January by a cultural pact providing for the exchanges of scientists, students, cultural and sports delegations, theatrical companies

84. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, September 12-19, p. 17003.

85. Keessing's, November 11-18, 1961, p. 18432.

and tourists.⁸⁶ Despite these mutual overtures, the imperial regime remained closely aligned with the West and was the major recipient of American military and economic assistance to sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 1960s.

As the Eritrean movement became increasingly radicalised, the USSR offered assistance through the supply of arms. Much of this support was however channelled through proxies such as Czechoslovakia and the radical Arab states who also supported the Eritreans on their own account.⁸⁷ This development came into the open in April 1966 when eighteen tons of high-powered Czechoslovak arms flown in from Syria (for the Eritreans) was advertently intercepted at Khartoum Airport.⁸⁸

Despite their tacit support for the ELF, the Soviets were wary of getting closely identified with the

86. Keesing's, January 21-28, 1961, p. 17884.

87. On the Soviet-Arab-Eritrea connection in the 1960s, See Paul B. Henze, "Communism in Ethiopia", Problems of Communism, XXX(3), May-June, 1981, pp. 55-74.

88. See National Review 18(4) April 15, 1966, p. 315.

insurgents due to a lingering hope of weaning Ethiopia away from the United States. Besides, this clandestine involvement in the Eritrean struggle was in fact consistent with the Kremlin's chariness in dealing with non-state clients. Over the years, the USSR has cultivated a penchant for supporting incumbent governments or subnational movements that were certain to capture state power rather than obscure insurgencies whose futures were so uncertain.⁸⁹ This inclination toward supporting the status quo clearly attracts some advantages within the African context for it is a sure means of acquiring legitimacy in the O.A.U.⁹⁰

Even though events in Ethiopia after the deposition of Emperor Haile Selassie showed a tilt to

89. On the Soviet proclivity to take sides with incumbents, see Mark D. Katz, The Third World in Soviet Military Thought (London: Groom Helm, 1982), especially pp. 32-34, and, Roy Lyons, "USSR, China and the Horn of Africa", Review of African Political Economy, No. 12, May-August 1978, pp. 5-30.

90. See Christopher Clabham, "The Soviet Experience in the Horn of Africa" in E. J. Feuchtwanger and Peter Nailor (ed), The Soviet Union and the Third World (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 202-223, especially, p. 228.

the left, the Kremlin was initially cautious and hesitant to endorse the 1974 revolution. For one thing, the old ties between Addis Ababa and the US were still intact. Second, the Soviets too were already well established in Somalia - Ethiopia's next door neighbour. Moreover, the Dergue was initially dominated by pro-Chinese elements who wanted closer relationship with Peking rather than Moscow.⁹¹

In no time however, the pro-Moscow forces became ascendant and, by the spring of 1975, overtures were already being made to the Kremlin. Coincidentally, Moscow was also becoming increasingly sympathetic towards the regime, praising it as a "genuine progressive force".⁹² More importantly, it had already adjusted its position on the Eritrean question to reflect the exigency of courting the Dergue. On January 22, a Radio Moscow commentary stated that the "Ethiopian military government was doing all it could to solve the problem". (It

91. See Marina Ottaway, Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 103.

92. A.C.R., 1975/76, p. B205.

further accused the United States media of distorting the Eritrean question in order to widen the gulf between the Arabs and Ethiopia and pressure the PMAC to abandon its progressive social and economic reforms.⁹³

To some extent, Ethiopian officials also harped ceaselessly on this Arab-US connection with the Eritrean insurgency, and, indeed, it became the basis of their exhortation towards the Soviet Union. In an interview with TASS, the Soviet news agency, on December 4, 1975, Brigadier-General Teferi Banti, then Chairman of the ruling junta declared:

The Ethiopian revolution is national in scope and the socialist transformation is as widely comprehensible as possible. In some parts of Eritrea, however, the prevailing hostilities have created difficulties for the implementation of some programmes such as the nationalization of rural land and the organisation of peasants in farmers' association... The fact that some reactionary forces in the Arab world have lately increased the volume of their assistance is based on the belief that if the Ethiopian revolution is defeated in Eritrea, it might also fail in some parts of Ethiopia.

93. See Nimrod Novik, On the Shores of Bab al-Mandab: Soviet Diplomacy and Regional Dynamics (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Foreign Policy Research Institute, Monograph No. 26, 1978), p. 30.

Another interesting point in this respect is the fact that although the Eritrean secessionist movement has been active for over 13 years, it is only since our revolution that it has began (sic) to receive serious notice in the Press of the Western world...⁹⁴

Early in 1976, a Soviet delegation visited Ethiopia and applauded the country's "correct progressive stand".⁹⁵ At the same time, it endorsed the Dergue's "Nine-Point Peace Plan on Eritrea".⁹⁶ An indication that the Soviet-Ethiopia romance was getting closer came that year with the signing of a 2-year cultural agreement in June and a secret arms deal estimated at \$385 million in December.⁹⁷ These ties would become open and further concretised in no time. For, in the

94. A.C.R., 1975/76, p. C109.

95. A.C.R., 1976/77, p. B211.

96. Ibid. See also, Colin Legum "Realities of the Ethiopian Revolution", The World Today, August 1977, p. 305.

97. See Robin Luckham and Dawit Bekele, "Foreign Powers and Militarism in the Horn of Africa", Part II, Review of African Political Economy, No. 30, December 1984, pp. 7-28, at p. 18; and Ottaway, Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa, p. 105.

Aftermath of Mengistu's violent ascension to power in February 1977, Soviet position of Ethiopia and the Horn in general took a decisive turn.⁹⁸ Within twenty-four hours of his assumption of office, Mengistu met with the Soviet ambassador and all Eastern bloc members sent messages of support to him in rapid succession. And, in March, thirty Soviet tanks arrived in Ethiopia from South Yemen.⁹⁹

Having openly embraced the junta, the USSR began to advocate a negotiated federal status for Eritrea.¹⁰⁰ Soviet objective then was to have Eritrea within a Marxist confederation in the Red Sea precinct made up of Ethiopia, Somalia and South Yemen. This objective was canvassed by Cuba's Fidel Castro during his tour of the Horn in March 1977 but was roundly rejected by Somalia and the Eritrean forces.¹⁰¹

98. For vivid accounts of Mengistu's rise to power and the dramatic switch to Moscow, see A.C.R., 1976/77, p. B182, and Keesings, March 4, 1977, p. 28221-2.

99. Ottaway, Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa, p. 105.

100. See Lars Bondestam, "External Involvement in Ethiopia and Eritrea", in Basid Davison et al. Behind the War in Eritrea, p. 66.

101. See Colin Legum, "Crisis in Africa", Foreign Affairs, 57(3) 1977, p. 633.

Meanwhile, the Eritrean insurgency was on the upsurge while the Somali-backed insurgents (the Western Somali Liberation Front, WSLF) were also intensifying their attacks in the Ogaden province. With these wars on two fronts, President Mengistu desperately needed arms, and, to this end, he made a trip to, and found an enthusiastic patron in, Moscow.¹⁰² In a veiled reference to Eritrea, President Mengistu again re-invoked the Arab-imperialist connection:

As for the Red Sea, recent events show that the imperialists would like to establish their control over this region with the help of certain Arab countries, in the first place, Saudi Arabia, and in violation of the legitimate right of other states and peoples of this region and to the detriment of free international navigation.¹⁰³

It was however the Somali invasion of that year that presented the much-needed opportunity for Addis Ababa and Moscow to now fully cement their budding

102. See Africa Research Bulletin, Vol. 14, No. 18, September 1977, p. 4527.

103. See Keessing's, July 1, 1977, p. 28423.

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relationship. After repelling Somalia in the Ogaden war, Ethiopia shifted the locus of the war to Eritrea with the full compliments of Soviet advisers and material.

The first hint of Soviet participation in the counter-offensives in Eritrea was given in January 1978 by the EPLF in a statement that the USSR was intervening in Eritrea with "the most sophisticated armaments" which could be manned only by Soviet or Cuban personnel. A subsequent statement by the organization pointedly accused Moscow (and Havana) of participating in the suppression of Eritrean revolution and called on "world progressive forces" to seek an end to Soviet intervention in the war.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the Soviets themselves were soon to admit support for Addis Ababa against the Eritreans. On March 15, 1978, Pravda linked the rebels in Eritrea to "international enemies of socialism" (Western and Arab countries) whose objective was to weaken Ethiopia and cut it off from outlets to the sea.

¹⁰⁴ Keessing's, May 26, 1978, p. 28944.

It concluded that the "secessionists" were "objectively helping the realisation of imperialist designs".¹⁰⁵

Since the counter-offensives on Massawa in December 1977, the USSR has taken active part in successive Ethiopian military campaigns against the Eritreans. Apart from arms supply, maintenance of equipment, training and advisory roles, Soviet personnel have played active combat role, operating sophisticated jet fighters and artilleries. Indeed, this foreign support was most decisive in re-capturing Eritrea which had virtually passed under insurgents' control.¹⁰⁶

Even though Eritrea was eventually re-conquered, the war did not come to an end as the guerillas merely made a "tactical withdrawal" into the countryside from

105. Ibid.

106. See Clapham, "The Soviet Experience in the Horn of Africa", p. 214; and Kola Olufemi, "Soviet Militarism in the Horn of Africa", Nigerian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1989, pp. 50-81.

where they continued their resistance.¹⁰⁷ In the circumstance, Soviet presence remained crucial to Ethiopia's effort at containing the insurgency.

In the subsequent anti-Eritrean offensives, therefore, the Soviets continued to play an active role backing the government's army. Eritrean sources reportedly charged that Soviet officers were still taking part in the war¹⁰⁸ and in December 1979, the EPLF leader stated, even if hyperbolically, that "we (Eritreans) are no longer fighting the Dergue; now it is the Soviet Union".¹⁰⁹ At a point, the EPLF further accused USSR of escalating the fighting to unprecedented level through the use of chemical weapons. Echoing similar accusation, an international relief agency, OXFAM, had also accused the Soviet Union and Ethiopia of using a "particularly vicious form of modern chemical warfare" against the Eritrean people.¹¹⁰

107. See Selected Publications of the EPLF, Op. cit., p.153.

108. See Keesing's; July 1978, p. 32237.

109. Keesing's, January 4, 1980, p. 30015.

110. See the letter dated 24/2/82 titled "Aggression Against the Eritrean People" by Pierre Galand, Secretary-General of OXFAM-Belgique, to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs (mimeo).

The complete reversal of Soviet standpoint, from that of support for the Eritrean struggle in the 1950s and the '60s, and now, to cooperation with Ethiopia in suppressing the same cause, has to be situated within the context of its strategic and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa. No doubt, Moscow attaches a lot of importance to the region for, as its Ministry of Foreign Affairs once noted:

The Horn is primarily of military, political and economic importance. The importance of this region is mainly because of its situation, where the two continents of Africa and Asia meet. There are many good harbours in the Persian Gulf and in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, there are maritime routes which link the oil producing countries with America and Europe.¹¹¹

At each turn, then, the USSR's involvement in the conflict has been designed to meet the crucial imperative of gaining access to the strategic terrain of the Red Sea. In the 1960s, its clandestine support for the Eritreans

111. See Keesing's May 26, 1978, p. 28992.

could serve several ends: establish concrete ties with the Eritreans should they succeed in gaining independence; weaken and hasten the collapse of the imperial regime; put pressure on the United States and ultimately dislodge the Americans from the Kagnev base; and; gain popularity with radical Arab states.

By the close of the decade, Moscow was no longer content with its marginal position in the region and was then itching to establish a bolder foothold commensurate with its status as a world power, and which would enable it to counteract American influence and the ideological challenge posed by China. Besides, it was desperate to promote its own geo-political interests by acquiring a network of naval and air facilities as a means of power projection and, even more crucial, to offset Western naval deployments.¹¹²

112. On the developments in Soviet strategic thought and policy, particularly as they relate to Africa and the Third World in general, see Mark N. Katz, The Third World in Soviet Military Thought, op. cit.; Rajan Menon, Soviet Power and the Third World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Bruce D. Porter, The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and, Morris Rothenberg, The USSR and Africa: New Dimensions of Soviet Global Power (Washington, D.C.: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1980).

With the attainment of a rough strategic parity with the US, and a growing capacity to project military power, the Soviet navy had become increasingly crucial to Soviet military diplomacy; to show the flag, neutralise western monopoly and fulfil other military and security missions for clients. A key architect of Soviet naval development and strategy, Admiral Gorshkov had canvassed that because of its mobility, flexibility and high standard of readiness, and general controllability, the navy constituted the most potent instrument of "distant diplomacy".¹¹³ In line with this injunction, the navy has, over the years, emerged as a major instrument of Soviet diplomatic and strategic objectives in the Third World.¹¹⁴ Access to facilities

113. See Admiral Sergel C. Gorshkov, Red Star Rising at Sea (Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute, 1974); Geoffrey Jukes, "The Soviet Union and the Indian Ocean", Survival, Vol. XIII, No. 11, November 1971, pp. 370-376; and Alvin J. Cottrel, "The Soviet Union and the Indian Ocean", in Abbas Amirie (ed) The Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in International Politics (Teheran: Institute of International Political and Economic Studies, 1975), at p. 112.

114. For additional perspectives on Soviet naval doctrine and developments, see Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, The Sea in Soviet Strategy (London: Macmillan, 1983), and David Holloway, The Soviet Union and the Arms Race (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

around the littorals of World's major seas has therefore been a cardinal objective of the Kremlin. In regard to the Red Sea, this interest was hardly concealed, for, at every opportunity, it consistently enjoined on Ethiopia the necessity for turning the sea into a "zone of peace", ostensibly with a view to thwarting the alleged plan in the imperialist and Arab circles to turn it into an "Arab Lake".¹¹⁵

Eritrea's command over approaches to the Sea, its proximity to the Middle East, Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean, certainly make it a prime target of Soviet interest. A base around here would facilitate repairs and contribute generally to the logistic and deployment of vessels. Perhaps, more importantly, from this base, they could possibly interdict oil tankers using the Red Sea routes for shipments of oil to the US and Europe in the event of hostilities.¹¹⁶

115. See Keessing's, December 15, 1978, p. 29538, for excerpts of communique signed between Ethiopia and the USSR during the visit of Vasily Kuznetsov, then the First Vice-President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet State.

116. See Richard B. Rannick, "Soviet Military Interests in Africa", ORBIS, 28(1), Spring 1984, pp. 123-142; Albert L. Weeks "Soviet Geopolitical Momentum", Horn of Africa 2(1) January/March, 1979, pp. 42-53; and, Kola Olufemi "Sino-Soviet Rivalry in the Horn of Africa", Horn of Africa, 6(3), 1984, pp. 16-24.

With the facilities earlier secured at the Somali port of Berbera, the change in Ethiopia in 1974 culminating in the diminution of US presence, presented, or was perceived by Moscow as, an opportunity to spread its strategic umbrella and maintain a veritable Pax Sovietica over the entire terrain of the Horn. It was when this design collapsed that it swiftly moved over to the side of Ethiopia.¹¹⁷

In any case, Ethiopia is larger and possesses a long coastline stretching to the Red Sea. And, as Albert Weeks observed, a united Ethiopia is "infinitely more preferable as any ally" to Somalia.¹¹⁸ After 1974, this attraction became even greater because of the perceived parallels between the Bolshevik revolution and the one that swept Selassie out of power. In both contexts, a profound upheaval had occurred, within

117. See Bowyer J. Bell, "Strategic Implications of the Soviet Presence in Somalia" ORBIS, 19(2) Summer 1975, pp. 402-411.

118. Albert L. Weeks, "The Eagles Gather About the Horn", Horn of Africa, 3(2) 1980, at p. 47; also, Paul Henze, "Getting a Grip on the Horn" in Walter Laqueur, (ed.), The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in the Third World (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 150-186. See, also, Steven David, "Realignment in the Horn: The Soviet Advantage", International Security 4(2) Fall 1979, pp. 69-90.

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predominantly feudal and multinational settings. The possibility, or, imperative of guiding the young revolutionaries (Dergue) along the right direction therefore offered policy makers in Moscow very exciting prospects.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the decision to back the Dergue against the Eritreans had to be rationalised along ideological lines. In 1978, a Moscow news magazine, Weekly Review, had asserted that:

The genuine interests of the population of the province (Eritrea) coincide with the interests of the entire Ethiopian people, which is trying to build life on new principles... The revolutionary forces supported national unity and saw the whole national question in the context of class struggle within the country and the international sphere.¹²⁰

In a similar vein, a Soviet analyst posited:

Many researchers recognised the progressive character of the Eritrean movement in the years when it opposed the anti-popular monarchist regime of Haile Selassie. However, by identifying the revolutionary regime with monarchy, the Eritrean insurgents showed their political immaturity and acted as a tool in the hands of those hostile to the cause of national liberation.¹²¹

119. See Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution (London: Verso, 1981), especially, pp. 160-162.

120. Weekly Review (Moscow), March 20, 1978, p. 16.

121. Vladimir Simonov, Seething Continent: The Moscow Viewpoint (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1980), p. 35.

Again, this re-orientation of Soviet position on Eritrea was clearly consistent with its long-standing policy of supporting the resolution of the national question by defending the existing multi-national state. Although orthodox Marxist theory guarantees the right of self-determination up to secession, - a principle enshrined in the USSR's constitution-in reality, Moscow has only allowed formal autonomy and a measure of culture diversity within its own confines.¹²² Externally, too, it has always supported centralist-statist forces in such places as Nigeria, Burma and Iraq.¹²³ As such, its position on Eritrea was only a reflection of a long-standing pattern of policy on the national question. By exporting its interpretation of, and policy on, this problem, it seeks to internationalise and legitimise the position it adopts vis-a-vis the nationalities problem back home.

122. On the nationalities problem in the Soviet Union, See Erich Goldhagen, Ethnic Minorities in the Soviet Union (New York: Praeger, 1968); and K. Szporluk, "Nationalities and the Russian Problem in the USSR: an Historical Outline", Journal of International Affairs, 27(1), 1973, pp. 22-40; Patrick Cockburn, "Lateline USSR: Ethnic Tremors", Foreign Policy, No. 74, Spring 1989, pp. 168-184; and Gail W. Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem", Foreign Affairs, 68(4), Fall 1989, pp. 92-108.

123. On Soviet attitude to the national question in other countries, see, Fred Halliday, "The Arc of revolutions: Iran Afghanistan, South Yemen, Ethiopia", Race and Class, XX(4), Spring 1979, pp. 373-390; Roy Lyons, "USSR, China and the Horn", op. cit.

In addition, the Soviets have gained from their participation in the Eritrean war. Not only did it offer a terrain for the valorisation of weapons, it was also useful for reviewing conventional battle strategies. From the point of view of power projection, and research and development (R & D) in its armaments industry, such opportunities to test out new weapons and battle tactics particularly in a "low-intensity conflict" could prove highly invaluable.¹²⁴ The fact that high-ranking Soviet generals participated in the anti-Eritrean operations demonstrated the importance the Kremlin attached to the venture.¹²⁵

More concretely, they have been able to secure the long sought access to base facilities on the Red Sea Dahlak Islands - about 50 kilometers off the Eritrean coast - astride the sea routes through which most of Europe's oil supplies pass. Apart from the anchorage at Dahlak

124. On the notion of "low-intensity of conflict", see Jochen Hippler, "Low Intensity of Warfare: key strategy for the Third world Theatre", Middle East Report, 17(1) January-February 1987, pp. 32-38.

125. At least two Soviet generals including V. I Petrov, then Deputy Commander-in-Chief of its Ground Forces, participated actively in Ethiopian counter-offensive of 1977-78. See Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and intervention in the Horn of Africa, p.121; and, Samuel Makinda, Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa, p. 178.



islands, the Soviets also enjoy extensive air base and other military facilities in Ethiopia.¹²⁵ In 1980, Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, then Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Navy and Deputy Defense Minister, paid a week-long visit to the country touring military and civil installations such as the naval college and base at Massawa.¹²⁶ Shortly afterward, Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean squadron and the Mediterranean fleet - including far-ranging destroyers, amphibious landing crafts, nuclear sub-marines, merchant ships and trawlers - have frequently used the facilities at Dahlak Islands and the Massawa port.¹²⁷

By themselves, these facilities are of little strategic importance in light of major developments in warfare technology and the deployment patterns of US

125. See Phillip M. Allen, "The Indian Ocean: Very Much at Sea", in Colin Legum, (ed.) Africa Contemporary Record, 1981/82 p. A135; also, Peter Schwab, Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society (London: Francis Pinter, 1985), p. 107.

126. A.C.R., 1980/81, p. B186.

127. See Oye Ogunbadejo, "Andropov's African Policy, in Colin Legum, (ed.) Africa Contemporary Record, 1984/85, p. A261; also Makinda, Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa, p. 181-182.

nuclear submarines. Still, Moscow obviously placed some premium on a secure base system around the Red Sea. Farer has argued that because historical circumstances and western imperialism have denied the Soviets a worthwhile presence in Africa and the Middle East, the excessive value attached to the Red Sea should be seen as a function of their strategic marginality. The facilities on the Red Sea thus serve little more than a symbolic purpose, providing them only "a precarious fingerhold on the edge of both regions, not a field from which they can suddenly vault into prominence".¹²⁸

As a result of major changes in the USSR's overall global postures, there has resulted a gradual loosening of the ties with Addis Ababa. With the advent of President Mikhail Gorbachev, dramatic socio-economic reforms

128. Tom J. Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979), p. 161. Robin Luckham and Dawit Bekele have gone further to argue that despite the apparent Soviet presence in Ethiopia, it "may have ended up in a weaker overall strategic position" in the region. See their article, "Foreign Powers and Militarism in the Horn of Africa: Part II", op.cit., pp. 20-21.

(Perestroika) have been instituted as well as a policy of political openness (Glasnost) aimed at democratising the political system.¹²⁹

Concerning foreign policy, there has also emerged a new approach which Gorbachev tagged novy mishleniye (New Thinking) based on the conviction that international politics can no longer be seen in terms of the old ruts of East-West rivalry. In place of the erstwhile invocation of "class struggle", a concept, that of "common interest of mankind" or "universal human values" has been put forward as the determinant of the USSR's external relations.¹³⁰

129. On the reforms instituted by President Gorbachev, see David A. Dyker (ed), The Soviet Union under Gorbachev: Prospects for Reform (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Ronald J. Hill and Jan Ake Dellenbrant, Gorbachev and Perestroika: Towards a New Socialism (Aldershot: Gower, 1989); and Seweryn Bialer, "Gorbachev's Move", Foreign Policy, No. 68, Fall 1987, pp. 59-87.

130. On the "New Thinking" in Soviet Foreign Policy, see, for instance, Sidney A. Ploss, "A New Soviet Era", Foreign Policy, No. 62, Spring 1986, pp. 44-60; Seweryn Bialer, "New Thinking and Soviet Foreign Policy", Survival, XXX(4), July/August 1988, pp. 291-309; and Paul Marantz, "Soviet 'New Thinking' and East-West Relations", Current History, 87 (531) October 1988, pp. 309-321.

Indeed, these changes have led to a major reassessment of foreign policy priorities in which the European, superpower and Asia-Pacific theatres have again assumed the pride of place over and above the gray areas of the globe. Consequently, traditional Marxist clients in the Third World, especially in Africa and Latin America, can no longer count on the automatic support of the Soviet Union and its erstwhile East European allies.¹³¹

Already, there are indications that the Kremlin is losing its keenness to back the Addis Ababa regime. For one thing, Moscow is not happy that three of its military officers serving in Ethiopia were captured at the battle of Afabet and are being held hostage by the EPLF since 1988.¹³² During Mengistu's visit to Moscow that year, the Soviets made it clear that the arms supply agreement which runs out in 1990 will not be renewed. Moreover, the Kremlin has indicated a new preference for a negotiated settlement and, in fact, admonished the Ethiopian leader to find a "just solution" to the

131. See Peter Shearman, "Gorbachev and the Third World: an era of reform?" Third World Quarterly; 9(4), October 1987, pp. 1083-1117; and, Francis A. Kornegay, "Moscow Reappraises African Commitments", Washington Report on Africa, Vol. VII(1), January 15, 1989, from p. 1.

132. See The Middle East (London), No. 164, June 1988, pp. 12-15.

Eritrean problem.¹³³

Not only has the Soviet Union gradually begun to withdraw support for the Ethiopian regime, it is actively proposing dialogue with the Eritreans. Significantly, and in the first direct contact between a Kremlin official and the insurgents, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Anatoly Adonislin met with Aferworki (EPLF leader) in London on July 4, 1989 and canvassed the need for serious dialogue to end the war.¹³⁴ This development clearly signalled that Moscow's new preference for peaceful settlements of regional conflicts has extended to Eritrea. The problem, though, is that its favoured solution of federalism has even become less persuasive and acceptable to the nationalists.¹³⁵ Besides, coming at a time when the

133. See Africa Research Bulletin, 24(4) May 15, 1987, p. 8486.

134. Bogdan Szajkowski, "Ethiopia: A weakening Soviet Connection?", The World Today, 45'a & 9) August/September 1989, pp. 153-156, at p. 156.

135. Communication with EPLF officials (Europe office), London, March and August, 1990. The officials are: Erias Debessai, Member of Central Committee and Head of Foreign Relations; and, Yermane G. Meskel, Director of Information.

Kremlin too is battling to contain nationalist uprising and secession in its Baltic republics - particularly Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia,¹³⁶ it is easy to see why, despite its military withdrawal, the Soviets will continue to stand by Ethiopia's territorial unity in outright opposition to Eritrea's struggle for independence.¹³⁷

II. Cuba

Cuba's involvement in the conflict started in the 1950s, and, apart from its advocacy of the Eritrean cause at such forums as the Afro-Asian-Latin American Peoples' solidarity Organisation, it helped train a number of the movement's cadres. By the close of the

136. On the virus of nationalism plaguing the USSR itself, see Time, January 29, 1990, pp. 8-13.

137. Moscow has withdrawn all its military advisers from Eritrean and reduced the total number in the country from 1500 to 600. Also, in the aftermath of the capture of Massawa by the EPLF, the USSR has refused to allow its fleet of transport aircrafts, stationed at Addis Ababa airport, to re-supply the 2nd Army trapped and cut off in a triangular enclave around Asmara. For more details, see Newsweek, May 7, 1990, pp. 30-32.

écccccó, a considerable number of Eritrean fighters had undergone comprehensive training in insurgency and guerilla warfare under Cuban instructors. Cuba's (and, to some extent, Chinese) assistance in this regard, constituted a major boost for the development of the movement and was actually more effective than the help rendered by the Arabs.¹³⁹ Indeed, relations between the liberation movement and Havana were quite warm up till the mid-1970s.¹³⁸

After the Ethiopian revolution, however, there emerged a profound contradiction between Havana's long-standing support for the Eritreans and its attraction to the self-proclaimed socialist regime in Addis Ababa. For its part, and in the wake of the diplomatic offensive aimed at undercutting the insurgents, the Dergue had dispatched its Foreign Minister, Colonel Feleke Gedle-Ghiorgis to Cuba in October 1977 and reportedly obtained full support for the regime.¹³⁹

138. See Haggai Erich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, p. 28.

139. On the role of the Arab states, see Chapter 4 of this study.

139. See Keesing's, January 6, 1978, p. 28760.

When Mengistu himself subsequently visited Havana in April 1978, Castro hailed him as a man:

... with clear political ideas, of audacious and energetic character, the expression of the most advanced and solid thinking in the midst of the political and social whirlwind created by the unexpected and extraordinary events of the Ethiopian revolution.¹⁴⁰

By then, Cuba's position on Eritrea had also undergone a reorientation with Castro advising in reference to Eritrea, that the question of nationalities in Ethiopia could be solved only "within the framework of a revolutionary state with its right to unity, absolute integrity and sovereignty". Specifically, he posited that the Eritrean conflict was an internal matter for Ethiopia and should be settled through negotiations. In a communique at the end of the visit, both sides agreed that priority must be accorded to the strengthening

140. See "PMAC Chairman's visit to Cuba", (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information and National Guidance), May 1978, p. 14; for more on Cuba's assessment of and attraction to the Ethiopian Revolution, see Raul Valdes, "Vivo Ethiopia The Unknown Revolution" (Havana: 1978).

of Ethiopia's unity and territorial integrity as "imperialism and its reactionary allies advocated secession and territorial demands on ethnic and religious bases". Castro however cautioned that his troops would assist Ethiopia only in the event of external aggression.¹⁴¹ Echoing Castro, the Foreign Minister, Malmieca Peoli Isidoro, reiterated in Algiers on June 26, 1978, that a political solution to the Eritrean problem would have to be found "within the framework of recognising the rights of peoples inside a unified Ethiopia".¹⁴²

The real test of this adjustment in Cuban position did not however come until after the Ogaden war when its troops were now face-to-face with Eritrean fighters. At this point, the Cubans became uncomfortable with the new role they were to play in the counter-offensives against the liberation movement. In the circumstance,

141. For more details of Mengistu's visit and Castro's remarks, see, Keesing's, December 15, 1978, p. 29538.

142. Ibid.

Chair Vice-President and Deputy Premier, had to state in February 1978, that Ethiopia was not entitled to use Cuban advisers against the Eritrean forces as self-determination was an internal matter which should be settled politically.¹⁴³ As a matter of fact, Cuba had refused to allow its military personnel to be diverted to fight in Eritrea and throughout the major counter-offensives in 1978, its soldiers took no active role.

In itself, the fact of Cuban non-participation was more apparent than real. For, once Cuban troops were stationed in Asmara, and, as long as they fought in the Ogaden, they invariably aided Ethiopia to redeploy and concentrate its forces on the war in Eritrea. Therefore, as Clapham succinctly, perhaps, uncharitably, explains:

143. Keessing's May 26, 1973, p. 28994. On the Cuban-Ethiopian discord over Eritrea, see, also Nelson F. Valdes, "Cuban Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa", Cuban Studies 10(1) January 1980, pp. 49-80.

Cuban non-involvement thus seems to have been, as much as anything, a device designed to protect the revolutionary/ideological purity on which much of the legitimacy of Cuba's African policy depends.¹⁴⁴

Even so, Eritreans themselves were extremely hesitant to admit Cuban involvement in the war. A correspondent of the news agency, Associated Press, who visited Eritrea in May 1978 quoted the General Secretary of the defunct ELF, Tesfai Wolder Michael, as saying that "there is no proof of Cubans being active in the fighting" and that the organisation still regarded them (Cubans) as "strategic friends".¹⁴⁵ This view has been subsequently corroborated by the EPLF's General Secretary who admitted that:

The Cubans have been clear in many things. It is said that they refused to participate in the war in Eritrea and they have been consistent in that policy. During the 6th offensive, the regime requested that the Cubans units in the Ogaden come to the north to participate in the offensive. But it is said that they refused.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Clapham, "The Soviet Experience in the Horn of Africa", p. 214.

¹⁴⁵ See Lars Bondestam, External Involvement in Ethiopia and Eritrea, p. 71.

¹⁴⁶ See interview with the General-Secretary of the EPLF Issayas Aferworki, in James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984), p. 136.

As a matter of fact, while Eritrean leaders regularly berated the United States and the USSR for their "hostile" and "antagonistic" attitude to the Eritrean cause, they tended to be soft on Cuba and uniformly described its posture as "passive".¹⁴⁷ The fact that Eritreans perceive Cuba's position differently from the USSR's is quite instructive because it raises a fundamental question pertaining to the relationship between Havana and Moscow and the way this affects Cuba's involvement in the Third World and Eritrea in particular.

Broadly, there are three perspectives on Cuba's foreign policy. One school of thought, often rightly dismissed as simplistic, contends that Cuba's dependence on the USSR makes it a veritable "surrogate" slavishly dancing to the tunes dictated by the "big brother", that is, the latter. Often adduced as evidences

¹⁴⁷. Communication with EPLP officials, March 1990.

of Havana's subservience are the close ideological and party links between the two and its heavy economic indebtedness to the Kremlin. To advocates of this line therefore, Cuba has been serving as a mere "expeditionary force", or more charitably, "an enthusiastic accomplice" in the advancement of Soviet geopolitical interests.

A second, and opposing viewpoint sees Cuba as a self-motivated "internationalist" state committed to the defence and advancement of anti-imperialist and revolutionary movements. In this sense, Cuba's involvement in Angola and Ethiopia is seen as being consistent with the activist profile earlier set under the influence of Che Guevara in the early 1960s.

Yet, a third perspective, closely related to the "internationalist" thesis concedes that although Havana is propelled by a revolutionary drive borne largely out of Castro's zealotry, it nonetheless must coordinate its policies with and operate within the parameters set by the Kremlin. As the position further goes, given the

congruence in their approaches to most issues, Cuba has virtually become an "international paladin" promoting its own as well as Soviet interests. In this connection, and because of its effectiveness and higher acceptance rating in the Third World, Havana has been able to gain some leverage with Moscow.¹⁴⁸

Certainly, Cuba does have its own objectives for maintaining a high profile in the Third World and argument that it is a blind Soviet proxy is patently inadequate as it completely misses the dynamics of Cuba's foreign policy and its interaction with the USSR. Though heavily indebted to the latter, its involvement in Africa, and the Third World generally, definitely stems from an endogenous and fervent impulse to play an internationalist role in support of anti-imperialist and liberation causes. The Cuban leader Fidel Castro, has often enthused that his people were "heirs to the internationalist tradition set by Maximo Gomez and Che Guevara" and that "internationalism was a matter of repaying (their) debt to humanity".¹⁴⁹

148. On these varying perspectives

On cooperation with the USSR in the Third World, Castro was wont to emphasise the fact that "Cuba alone bears the responsibility" for decisions to get involved in external conflicts. In regard to Angola, for instance, he insisted:

The USSR never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country. The USSR is extraordinarily respectful and careful in its relations with Cuba. A decision of that nature could only be made by our own party...150

In addition, he maintains that Havana shares in the costs of its internationalist duties and that:

... all those rendering internationalist cooperation; civilians, military, officers, all have their salary paid here... The country where they go provides housing and food... We can do this for a basic reason... we have the people to do it with... In this, we have an overwhelming advantage over all nations of Latin America and the Third World. I don't think any other country with a relatively small population has such top quality human potential.151

150. See Fidel Castro, "Cuba's Internationalist Volunteers in Angola", New International (New York), 2(2) Fall, 1985, pp. 199-135, at p. 121.

151. Ibid., pp. 128-9.

Cole Blasier has further buttressed the "joint venture" thesis in relation to Soviet-Cuban involvement in Africa. In his words:

It can best be described as a relationship in which neither partner exerts complete control or influence over the other and in which mutual interests of both countries are served but at costs to both sides.¹⁵²

Obviously, Cuba takes advantage of the USSR's superpower status, military and economic resources in furthering its own objectives in the Third World, and, as Raymond Duncan has observed, it (Havana) actively exercises some leverage with the Kremlin, attracting in the process, huge economic and trade concessions from the Eastern bloc.¹⁵³

In relation to its foreign policy objectives, internationalism has been useful for building political

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152. Cole Blasier, "Comecon in Cuban Development", in Blasier and Mesa-Lago (ed.), Cuba in the World, p. 225.
153. W. Raymond Duncan, "Castro and Gorbachev: Politics of Accommodation", Problems of Communism, XXXV(2) March/April, 1986, pp. 45-57; and, The Soviet Union and Cuba: Interests and Influence (New York: Praeger, 1985).

alliances with radical Third World regimes. Besides, it serves to advertise Cuba's revolutionary credentials and enhance Castro's leadership potentials within the non-aligned community.¹⁵⁴ More importantly, perhaps, it helps in the sustenance of the revolutionary order at home.

In a way, the advancement of world revolution helps to deepen the Cuban revolution because, not only might it advance socialist consciousness and commitment and shake off ideological rustiness among its own people, it also extends the frontiers of socialist and anti-imperialist struggles. In effect, internationalism helps to counteract pressures by Washington to isolate the Cuban revolution. Castro himself has enthusiastically admitted to this crucial political gain:

154. See H. Michael Erisman, Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985); Zdenek Cervenka and Colin Legum, "Cuba: The New Communist Power in Africa" in Colin Legum (ed) Africa Contemporary Record, 1977/78, A103-116; and Edward Gonzalez, "Complexities of Cuban Foreign Policy", Problems of Communism, November-December 1977, pp. 1-15.

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When our men and women fulfil internationalist missions, be they civilian or military, they always return to our country with more revolutionary, patriotic, and internationalist spirit. If one day the imperialist dare attack our country, they will see what they will encounter in Cuba. They will see what it's like to fight against an entire people, men, women, young people, old people and even children. They will see that a country of ten million people ready to struggle can never be defeated... And in that case... the African youth would fight at our sides. That is internationalism, that is reciprocity.¹⁵⁵

Since the 1977-78 period when its troops were dispatched to Ethiopia, Cuba has been steadfast in its refusal to participate in the military pacification in Eritrea. Rather, it has consistently maintained that the only just way to settle the problem is through peaceful negotiations. True, this position has, to some length, been compromised by the support it gave the Dergue, even so, Eritreans themselves recognise the dilemma surrounding Havana's policy over the eritrean issue. As the EPLF leader remarks:

155. Fedel Castro, "Cuba's Internationalist Volunteers in Angola", p. 134.

... One can understand it from their way of putting things. 'We are with the just cause of the Eritreans and we know that they are doing well but there is nothing we can do'. That is their (Cubans) position in regard to the Eritrean war.¹⁵⁶

No matter what, Eritrea has shown the rather tenuous nature of Cuban-Soviet cooperation in the Third World and has, at least, demonstrated that Cuba can take positions that run counter to Soviet inclinations.¹⁵⁷ In fact, since 1984, the Cubans have started to pull out of Ethiopia apparently on account of economic constraints. According to a report, Havana was funding its Ethiopian operations to the tune of \$6 million a year.¹⁵⁸ At a time when the Cuban economy was experiencing a downward turn caused by low production, mismanagement and foreign indebtedness, the cost of backing foreign regimes had become an increasingly

156. See Interview in Firebrace and Holland, Never Kneel Down, pp. 136-7.

157. See Daniel S. Papp, "The Soviet Union and Cuba in Ethiopia", Current History, 75, March 1979, pp. 110-115.

158. A.C.R., 1984/85, p. B220.

unbearable burden.¹⁵⁹

Apart from this financial constraint, there was also the widening distance between Castro and the Kremlin leaders, culminating in open disagreements on foreign policy and ideological issues. In particular, Castro is piqued by the wide-ranging ideological changes being undertaken by President Gorbachev and has maintained that Cuba would toe its own line along the orthodox Marxist-Leninist path. Addressing the Cuban Communist Party in 1986, he insisted:

... the ideas that inspired the (Cuban) Revolution... were our ideas and interpretations of society according to Marxist-Leninist principles. Nobody told us to interpret things; we interpreted them for ourselves.¹⁶⁰

Amidst this growing discord with Moscow, and as the Soviets too are beginning to back out of profligate militarism and support for diverse clients, Cuba's

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159. On the economic constraints facing Cuba, see Jorge Perez-Lopez, "Cuban Economy in the 1980's" Problems of Communism XXV(5) September-October, 1986, pp. 15-34.
160. Granma Weekly Review, December 14, 1986. On the roots of the widening gulf between Havana and Moscow, see W. Raymond Duncan, "Castro and Gorbachev: Politics of Accommodation", op. cit.

enthusiasm for internationalism has certainly become whittled down. It was thus not surprising when, in September 1989 it began a final pull-out from Ethiopia, thereby disengaging physically, from involvement in the Eritrean-Ethiopia conflict.¹⁶¹

161. See Africa Events (London), No. 12, December 1989, p. 13.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In its basic roots and conditions under which it erupted, international involvement in the Eritrean problem was palpably inevitable. To begin with, both parties to the conflict have had to cultivate external ties and support thereby drawing foreign actors into the dispute. For various reasons, too, external actors are interested in the issue at stake and, in the circumstance, the Eritrean problem has become caught up among competing external interests and considerations.

Far back at the United Nations when the fate of the Eritrean colony was being considered in the 1940s, it was debated essentially as it affected the interests of the major foreign powers. Consequently, it was within the context of East-West and global geopolitical rivalry that the fate of the Eritrean people was determined.

This study has identified the external actors involved in the Eritrean conflict and these include neighbouring states, specifically, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt and Libya. Others from across the Red Sea, are Saudi

Arabia, the erstwhile PDRY, Israel, Syria and Iraq. Some regional bodies, in particular, the O.A.U., the Islamic Conference and the Arab League have also taken different stands on the conflict. The extra-regional actors involved, directly or otherwise, in the conflict include Cuba, the Superpowers, and the United Nations Organisation.

Before the Ethiopian revolution, the international alignment of forces over the Eritrean problem was relatively straightforward and stable. With its initial Islamic, Pan-Arabist, and radical orientation, the nationalist movement, led succession in by the ELF and EPLF drew support from the Arab States and the socialist countries, particularly, Cuba and the Soviet Union. Even so, support for the movement was often tempered by constraints arising from the domestic and external circumstances of these external patrons. For instance, after the Six-Day war, the set-back suffered by the Arab states cost the insurgents considerable support from their erstwhile backers in the Middle East.

Also, in the aftermath of the overthrow of the imperial regime, the pattern of international alignment changed significantly especially as the Dergue became increasingly radicalised. Besides the revolutionary reforms which endeared Addis Ababa to several radical socialist and Arab states, the Dergue also mounted a spirited diplomatic offensive-advertising its socialist credentials - and, in the process, eroded the external support base of the Eritreans. Before long, the Ethiopian regime had succeeded in weaning away the USSR, Cuba, Libya, PDRY, Egypt, Syria, and the PLO, among others, from the insurgent movement. Thus, by the close of the 1980s, most of the erstwhile sympathisers of the Eritrean cause had switched their allegiance to Addis Ababa.

Despite the severance of Ethiopian-American ties, and the subsequent Soviet romance with the Mengistu regime, Washington did not rush into a counter-alliance with the Eritrean forces. Indeed, superpower involvement in the Eritrean issue was borne out of ideological rivalry and was covert and manipulative,

essentially as a means of counteracting the other power or gaining tactical leverage in their global geopolitical competition. At different turns, while one superpower supported and counted on the survival of the regime in Addis Ababa, the other lurked around, patiently counting on the Ethiopia's readiness to switch patrons. Neither the Soviet Union which provided furtive assistance to the Eritreans in the 1960s, nor the United States which lost out in Ethiopia in the wake of the 1974 revolution, was willing to challenge Ethiopia's territorial integrity. To have done so would not only have risked a direct confrontation between the superpowers, but would have amounted to a costly diplomatic and political affront on the majority of African states whose governments are committed to maintaining the territorial status quo. Therefore, as Fessehazion has observed, Eritreans have had the singular "misfortune"¹ that the superpowers would have to take turns to come to Ethiopia's aid and resist

1. Tekie Fessehazion, "The International Dimensions of the Eritrean Question", p. 22.

Eritrean aspirations for independence and national liberation. Reflecting on this trend, the EPLF leader once lamented:

In other situations like ours, one superpower is for the rebels, the other is against. But we have neither the Soviet Union nor the US supporting us.²

At the level of the international system, the Eritrean struggle for self determination has also been tightly isolated. Early in the 1960s, Eritreans made several entreaties to the United Nations, urging the world body to redress the annexation of their country. For instance, on November 20, 1962, the Eritrean community in Saudi Arabia sent a cable of protest to the Secretary General "against Ethiopia's flagrant violation of UN Resolution No. 390 A/V of December 2, 1950, and against the annexation of Eritrea to Ethiopia". The protest read further:

2. Eritrean Information, Vol. 9 No. 6, 1987, p. 6.

In accordance with the declaration of the Panel of Legal Consultants recorded in the Final Report of the UN Commissioner, we urge the world organisation to reconsider the Eritrean question and send a commission of inquiry to Eritrea in order to safeguard the human rights which the Resolution sought to defend.³

In memorandum after memorandum, the nationalist have been relentless in their quest to get the UN to discharge its "historic responsibility" towards Eritrea. A recent dispatch by the EPLF to the body urged:

... the General Assembly to muster courage and break this unholy silence... to stand true to the UN principles under which most of the colonised peoples obtained their freedom. Justice, like peace, is indivisible. Justice denied to a deserving cause ultimately corrodes the moral fabric on which the institutions in which you deliberate today rests. History will be your judge. We urge you to follow the example of the European parliament and several National European Parliaments and political parties... to support the just cause of the Eritrean people and support a just and peaceful resolution of the war.⁴

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3. Cable of Protest by the Eritrean Community in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to the Secretary General of the United Nations, November 20, 1962. Many other cables of protest are cited in Journal of Eritrean Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 1987, pp. 29-31.
 4. EPLF "Memorandum to the United Nations", reproduced in Eritrea Information, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1986, p. 14.

Notwithstanding these moral and legal exhortations, the UN has been steadfast in its refusal to reopen the Eritrean case. Indeed, once it did not initially protest Haile Selassie's incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia in 1962, the possibility that the UN would hear the case again became increasingly remote. Also, at the regional level, the OAU has been equally reluctant to consider the Eritrean issue due to the familiar political considerations and the prevailing international legal-normative order.

Within the society of states, there exists a deep-seated normative bias against territorial change. In virtually every case of collision between the state and a constituent ethnic group, the international community has mostly upheld the priority of state nationalism over separatist aspirations. This general tendency is a fall-out of the decolonisation process in which nationalism came to acquire an orthodox interpretation and its application, in James Mayall's words, became "tied in time and space to the withdrawal of the Europeans from erstwhile colonial possession".

Even though the mismatch of state and society continues to generate violent civil conflicts in several parts of the world, particularly in Africa, the sanctity of the territorial state is generally defended with every righteousness. The implication of this normative order is the freezing of the territorial map of the globe thus placing heavy odds against ~~nationalist~~ agitations against existing states. As Dennis Austin has observed:

... the remarkable feature today is the commitment by large and small states alike to keep the world as it is. If aggression occurs, it is not allowed to legitimise its success and secessionist claims by rebel societies are not accepted. The formal map of the globe has altered very little, therefore over the past 40 years, - and the present map of Africa closely resembles the colonial map, though of course it is now coloured black.⁵

Recent developments however indicate that the international community might be lifting the tight isolation it has imposed on the Eritrean struggle.

5. Dennis Austin, "Africa Repartitioned?", Conflict Studies, No. 193 (London: The Center for Security and Conflict Studies, 1986), p. 2.

In fact, the current posture, at least, at the global level, is one that favours reconciliation. Even so, and as will be shown below, the process of reconciliation has been bogged down in the resilient international normative and legal constraints.

Two major factors are responsible for the change in the posture of the international system over the Eritrean problem. First is the explosiveness the conflict has assumed and uncertainty about its outcome - a conjuncture which invariably impels both disputants and the international community towards reconciliation. Since the battle of Afabet, the tide and tempo of the war had changed dramatically and Addis Ababa has all but lost control of Eritrea and the military situation. The war-weary army has ceased to constitute an effective challenge to the nationalist forces. Not only has the army lost its internal cohesion, the hierarchy has been destroyed as a result of the two-way elimination of its most senior officers. The abortive coup against President Mengistu in May 1989 clearly demonstrated the simmering disaffection and opposition in the army

to Mengistu's militarist policies, particularly in Eritrea. Except for the Defence Minister, Major-General Haile Giorgis, the entire army command was either directly involved in or, at least, not hostile, to the move to topple Mengistu. More significant is that prominent among the putschists six-point demand was the call for an end to the multiple wars and resumption of dialouge with the nationalists.⁶ In the aftermath, the Mengistu regime was left with two hard choices: to continue the policy of "all to the war front" or work towards reconciliation with the insurgents. It was therefore not surprising when, mid-way in 1989, the Ethiopian Shengo (parliament) unanimously resolved to talk with Eritrean forces "without any preconditions".⁷

The second, and, perhaps, most important factor in the move towards reconciliation is the change in the international environment, particularly, the new-found US-Soviet cooperation in defusing global tensions through peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.

6. See Africa Confidential, 26 May, 1989, pp. 1-3.

7. New Africa, No. 262, July 1989, p. 12.

This thaw in the global arena stemmed from:

- (i) the dramatic changes in Soviet foreign policy;
- (ii) pressure for an end to the second Cold War from within both the United States and the USSR and,
- (iii) in relation to the African continent, a clear decline in available strategic stakes.

Reflecting on this new turn in East-West relations, Soviet Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze had enthused in November 1987 that the political thaw between the Soviet Union and the United States was bound to "alter the political climate of our planet".⁸ Going by recent developments, there is concrete indication that the superpowers are bent on reducing the drain of resources, into the endless conflicts in the Third world. For their part, Eritreans have been quick to perceive in this global situation a conducive atmosphere for putting their claims before the international community. As the EPLF leader readily admits:

8. Soviet Weekly (London) 5 December, 1987, p. 4.

Untill now, we ... have been the victims of undue bigpower competition. As such, we are among the first who hope to benefit from a safer world produced by a better international climate and cooperation.

Echoing similar sentiments, Ermias Debbessai, head of the Front's Foreign Relations Office (Europe), enthused that;

At the moment, with favourable international climate and Ethiopia's proven inability to impose itself militarily, we have strong ground to believe that the conflict can be resolved peacefully through international mediation.¹⁰

Having fought in virtual obscurity and isolation for three decades, Eritreans are striving to make the most out of the prevailing international attention to, and sympathy for, their cause. At its Second Congress in 1987, the EPLF decided to launch a diplomatic offensive aimed at pressing its claims before the international community. To this end, periodic high-level tours have been made and appeals sent to various states

9. Adulis (EPLF), Vol. VI, No. 6, June 1989, p. 24.

10. Communication with Ermias Debbessai, March 1989.

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and international bodies. In May 1989, for instance, the leader of the movement, Aferworki, made a tour of the United States soliciting American and international attention to the Eritrean problem and reiterating his organisation's recipe for peace.¹¹

Originally issued in 1980, the EPLF's peace plan offers a spectrum of possible options including a ceasefire and an international supervised referendum to ask Eritreans to choose one of: (i) regional autonomy; (ii) federation with Ethiopia; and, (iii) independence.¹² Up till now, the plan remains the basis of the EPLF's peace and diplomatic offensive. A statement by the Front in May 1990 insisted that the referendum proposal offers the only hope for a peaceful solution because, as it maintains, it is a "proposal for which there is no alternative".¹³

11. See New African, July 1989.

12. See the EPLF "Proposal on Referendum" of 20 November 1989; Appendix IV.

13. "EPLF Statement Calling on the UN to Supervise a Referendum in Eritrea"; Appendix V.

Peace Initiatives on the Eritrean Conflict

International efforts at mediating in the Eritrean conflict date back to 1977 when a series of meetings were held in East Germany between the Eritrean and Ethiopian government representatives. These initial moves did not get off the ground as the two sides could not agree on an agenda. Also, between 1982 and 1985, ten meetings - tagged "talks about talks" - were held in Rome and other European capitals.¹⁴ Just like the earlier attempt, these contacts failed to yield any result.

After a prolonged stalemate, the former Sudanese Prime Minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi, initiated a move in June 1988 towards bringing the insurgents and Ethiopian officials to the negotiating table. Further attempts were made in February and April 1989 but the Sudanese initiative collapsed due to the deadlock over the the question of international observers.¹⁵ While

14. A.C.R., 1985/86, p. B297.

15. Africa Events (London) May 1989, p. 16.

Eritrean forces wanted bodies such as the OAU, Arab League, and, in particular, the UN, to be present at the talks, Addis Ababa objected on the ground that "the matter is an Ethiopian internal problem".¹⁶ The main problem however was the refusal of the EPLF to attend the Khartoum meetings. In an explanation, the Front charged that Ethiopia was only using the talks to divide the Eritrean camp and also to cover up its military defeats. It further insisted on the presence of international observers, specifically, the UN, as a condition for participating in the peace talks. According to Meskel, international participation especially by the UN (also, OAU) is very crucial to the resolution of the problem because:

The Eritrean conflict is a product of UN Resolution hence UN (is) directly accountable. UN must have principal role in resolution of (the) conflict. OAU must also be involved as it is the appropriate continental body.¹⁷

16. New African, July 1989, p. 13.

17. Communication with Yermane Meskel, April 1990.

Apart from Sudan, the superpowers have also shown interest in mediating in the conflict. An Eritrean spokesman, Ahmed Haj, admitted that contacts (between EPLF and the superpowers) have been going on for the last two years and that "a dialogue has started, and it is good".¹⁸ During a visit to Ethiopia in June 1989, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, expressed Washington's readiness to help end the country's civil wars. The Soviets too have been putting pressures on their Ethiopian clients, urging them to find a political solution to the Eritrean problem.¹⁹ More significantly, Moscow has also been in contact with the EPLF canvassing the imperative of a peaceful solution.

The most concrete and widely supported initiative has been the talks held under the auspices of former US President, Jimmy Carter. After a first round of meetings convened at Atlanta in September 1989, a

18. Communication with Ahmed Haj, Secretary, (Europe Office) of the EPLF, August 1990.

19. See Africa Research Bulletin, 26(6) June 15, 1989, p. 9320.

second session of talks took place in Nairobi Kenya, between November 20 and 29, 1989. For some reasons, the Carter initiative represented a significant achievement for the insurgent forces. First, it was the first open and direct negotiation between the two warring parties. Second, and for the first time, Ethiopia acquiesced in the EPLF's demands for international observers, publicity, and, an open-ended (unconditional) talks.²⁰

Viewed against the long years of isolation, these concessions allowing for international observers and publicity represented major breakthroughs for the Eritrean forces. Indeed, the Carter initiative has served to confer international respectability on the EPLF. More importantly, it brought greater international attention to the Eritrean problem. In concrete terms, though, the talks did not yield any fruit and has actually been deadlocked due, mainly, to Ethiopia's refusal to accede to UN involvement in an

20. For details of the abortive Carter initiative, see Africa Events, October 1989, pp. 120-13.

observer capacity. Even though both sides had agreed to jointly invite international observers, Ethiopia had distanced itself from the attempt to invite the UN.²¹

Absolving itself from blames for the deadlock, the EPLF accused Addis Ababa of plugging the peace process into a dead-end because the Mengistu regime "felt trapped by the atmosphere and progress made in these talks". An official commentary by the movement deposed that:

Although the identity of observers and mechanism of inviting them was agreed and duly signed by both parties in Nairobi, Addis Ababa has now backtracked on its commitment and is refusing to put its signature on the invitation letter to the United Nations... So the peace process is being shattered by Ethiopia's bad-faith with regard to agreements it had solemnly signed.²²

In its own reaction, Addis Ababa had counter-accused

21. Africa Research Bulletin, 26(9) October 15, 1989.

22. See the "EPLF Statement of Clarification Concerning the Talks for a Peaceful Solution", reproduced in Adulis, Vol. VII, No. 3, March 1990.

the EPLF of renewing and escalating hostilities thereby "shattering the peace process". Still, Ethiopia insists that it was doing its utmost and remains firm in the "desire to seek a negotiated settlement with the secessionists".²³

At a point in the Carter talks, Ethiopia had become wary of further international participation and, in the circumstance, even the already settled international observers - Kenya, Senegal, United Kingdom and the OAU - swiftly declined invitations to the peace meetings.²⁴ The UN, for its part, had initially stated that it would not participate unless invited by both sides to the conflict. A clearer picture of the UN's stance later emerged when the Secretary-General expressly declared that the body would not participate because of its policy only to help in disputes between member states²⁵ - meaning that the UN considers the Eritrean problem an internal affair of Ethiopia.

23. See the Statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, concerning the Peace talks.

24. Africa Research Bulletin 26(11) December 15, 1989, p. 9492B.

25. Ibid.

Despite the favourable shift in international climate-making reconciliation possible in the first place -, the reluctance of the international community as demonstrated by the UN and the OAU clearly illustrates the resilience of those norms of inter-state behaviour which accord with the exigencies of regime and state security. Such norms, enshrined as the principles of non-interference in internal affairs of others and the sanctity of territorial integrity of states, are inherently pragmatic and conservative. Moreover, they tend to place premium on order rather than justice.

Almost inevitably then, the predisposition of the international community towards the status quo has further served to forment the deadlock which, in concrete terms, amounts to a gain for the Ethiopian side. For, while the deadlock persists, the incumbents can buy time to recuperate from their military losses and revitalise the war effort. Already, President Mengistu has vowed "to fight to the bitter end" and called for national mobilisation to rescue the country from what he described as the "verge of disintegration".²⁶ Also, by

26. New African, No. 275, August 1990, p. 43.

formally restoring links with Israel, the Mengistu regime has secured alternative source of arms to make up for the withdrawal of Soviet assistance. Soon after the restoration of ties with Tel Aviv in November 1989, evidence of Israeli military assistance to Ethiopia became clearer. In March this year, a military delegation headed by the Israeli Chief of Staff visited Addis Ababa and Ethiopia forces are reportedly using Israeli arms including machine guns, rocket launchers and Uzi sub-machine guns. Thanks to these fresh shipments of arms, government forces have been able to withstand the heavy offensives by the insurgents since the fall of Massawa. ~~Nonetheless~~, the Eritreans remain very close to a military victory and, unless a major reversal occurs, Asmara, the last stronghold of Ethiopian forces, is expected to fall very soon. Even so, the insurgents would still have to strive to gain international recognition and legitimisation for a de facto Eritrean state. As Ahmed Hajo ~~of the EPLF's Europe Office~~ admits:

... even if the conflict is resolved by force, which is ver imminent, the EPLF is bound to call for a UN supervised referendum. We don't want hijack our right.²⁷

Given the contradictory principles involved in the conflict-territorial integrity versus self-determination, as well as the vested interest of the international community in maintaining the status quo, a political resolution of the problem seems an increasingly remote possibility. In the essential characteristics, the Eritrean conflict approximates to the pattern of "grinding crisis" which, according to William Zartman often gets bogged down in stalemate because the parties "lack the necessary capability to escalate..."²⁸

Such conflicts, in which both incumbents and insurgents manage to hang on, are the "ones that have deadline, no decisive pressures to come to terms, and no resolution".²⁸ A crucial element of "grinding" conflicts is the long duration. James Coleman has postulated that the longer a war, the more it feeds on itself because not only do capabilities tend

27. Communication with Ahmed Haj, August 1990.

28. I. William Zartman, Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa, pp. 230-131.

to move to greater balance, goals also tend towards greater incompatibility.³⁰ Thus, in the case under study, and with the difficulty of military or peaceful resolution, the logical outcomes are stalemate and irreconcilability. Yet, the potential exists for renewed external involvement.

With time, and as uncertainty about the outcome deepens, foreign actors might increase support for either of the or both parties or press with greater determination for a negotiated settlement. Even if the Eritrean conflict is resolved militarily or through negotiation, the wounds already inflicted are bound to leave indelible scars. And, as each side licks its wounds, reconciliation would be impeded and the threat of a resurgence of war would remain potent. Whichever way it goes, therefore, Eritreans and Ethiopians seem destined for prolonged hostility.

30. See James N. Rosenau, "Internal War as an International Event" in his edited work, International Aspects of Civil Strife, pp. 45-91.

APPENDIX I

THE 1950 UN RESOLUTION ON ERITREA

Resolution 390 (v) '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', from the Fifth United Nations General Assembly, 316th Plenary Meeting, 2 December 1950.

Whereas by paragraph 3 of Annex XI to the Treaty of Peace with Italy, 1947, the Powers concerned have agreed to accept the recommendation of the General Assembly on the disposal of the former Italian colonies in Africa and to take appropriate measure for giving effect to it.

Whereas by paragraph 2 of the aforesaid Annex XI such disposal is to be made in the light of the wishes and welfare of the inhabitants and the interests of peace and security, taking into consideration the views of interested governments.

Now therefore,

The General Assembly, in the light of the reports of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea and of the Interim Committee, and

Taking into consideration

- (a) The wishes and welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, including the views of the various racial, religious and political groups of the provinces of the territory and the capacity of the people for self-government,
- (b) The interests of peace and security in East Africa,
- (c) The rights and claims of Ethiopia based on geographical, historical, ethnic or economic reasons, including in particular Ethiopia's legitimate need for adequate access to the sea,

Taking into account the importance of assuring the continuing collaboration of the foreign communities in the economic development of Eritrea.

Recognizing that the disposal of Eritrea should be based on its close political and economic association with Ethiopia, and

Desiring that this association assure the inhabitants of Eritrea the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, traditions, religions and languages, as well as the widest possible measure of self-government, while at the same time respecting the Constitution, institutions, traditions and the international status and identity of the Empire of Ethiopia.

A. Recommends that:

1. Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown.

2. The Eritrean Government shall possess legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs.

3. The jurisdiction of the Federal Government shall extend to the following matters: defence, foreign affairs, currency and finance, foreign and interstate commerce and external and interstate communications, including ports. The Federal Government shall have the power to maintain the integrity of the Federation, and shall have the right to impose uniform taxes throughout the Federation to meet the expenses of federal functions and services, it being understood that the assessment and the collection of such taxes in Eritrea are to be delegated to the Eritrean Government, and provided that Eritrea shall bear only its just and equitable share of these expenses. The jurisdiction of the Eritrean Government shall extend to all matters ~~not~~ vested in the Federal Government, including the power to maintain the internal police, to levy taxes to meet the expenses of domestic functions and services, and to adopt its own budget.

4. The area of the Federation shall constitute a single area for customs purposes, and there shall be no barriers to the free movement of goods and persons within the area. Customs duties on goods entering or leaving the Federation which have their final destination or origin in Eritrea shall be assigned to Eritrea.

5. An Imperial Federal Council composed of equal numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean representatives shall meet at least once a year and shall advise upon the common affairs of the Federation referred to in paragraph 3 above. The citizens of Eritrea shall participate in the executive and judicial branches, and shall be represented in the legislative branch of the Federal Government, in accordance with law and in the proportion that the population of Eritrea bears to the population of the Federation.

6. A single nationality shall prevail throughout the Federation:

(a) All inhabitants of Eritrea, except persons possessing foreign nationality, shall be nationals of the Federation;

(b) All inhabitants born in Eritrea and having one indigenous parent or grandparent shall also be nationals of the Federation.

Such persons, if in possession of a foreign nationality, shall, within six months of the coming into force of the Eritrean

Constitution, be free to opt to renounce the nationality of the Federation and retain such foreign nationality.

In the event that they do not so opt, they shall thereupon lose such foreign nationality;

(c) The qualifications of persons acquiring the nationality of the Federation under sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) above for exercising their rights as citizens of Eritrea shall be determined by the Constitution and laws on Eritrea;

(d) All persons possessing foreign nationality who have resided in Eritrea for ten years prior to the date of the adoption of the present resolution shall have the right, without further requirements of residence, to apply for the nationality of the Federation in accordance with federal laws. Such persons who do not thus acquire the nationality of the Federation shall be permitted to reside in and engage in peaceful and lawful pursuits in Eritrea;

The rights and interests of foreign nationals resident in Eritrea shall be guaranteed in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 7.

7. The Federal Government, as well as Eritrea, shall ensure to residents in Eritrea, without distinction of nationality, race, sex, language or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental liberties, including the following:

- (a) The right to equality before the law. No discrimination shall be made against foreign enterprises in existence in Eritrea engaged in industrial, commercial, agricultural, artisan, educational or charitable activities, nor against banking institutions and insurance companies operating in Eritrea;
- (b) The right to life, liberty and security of person;
- (c) The right to own and dispose of property. No one shall be deprived of property, including contractual rights, without due process of law and without payment of just and effective compensation;
- (d) The right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right of adopting and practising any creed or religion;
- (e) The right to education;
- (f) The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association;
- (g) The right to inviolability of correspondence and domicile, subject to the requirements of the law;
- (h) The right to exercise any profession subject to the requirements of the law;
- (i) No one shall be subject to arrest or detention without an order of a competent authority, except in case of flagrant and serious violation of the law in force. No one shall be deported except in accordance with the law;

(j) The right to a fair and equitable trial, the right for petition to the Emperor and the right of appeal to the Emperor for commutation of death sentences;

(k) Retroactivity of penal law shall be excluded;

The respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the requirements of public order and the general welfare alone will justify any limitations to the above rights.

8. Paragraphs 1 to 7 inclusive of the present resolution shall constitute the Federal Act which shall be submitted to the Emperor of Ethiopia for ratification.

APPENDIX II

THE ETHIOPIAN NINE POINT PEACE PLAN
OF 18 MAY 1976

Policy declaration of the Provisional Military Government to solve the problem in the Administrative Region of Eritrea in a peaceful way.

It is an indelible historical fact that the northern region of Ethiopia, called Eritrea for the last 87 years, had been the seat of the history, culture and administration of ancient Ethiopia. However, because of its location along the Red Sea and the strategic importance of its sea coast, the northern region of Ethiopia had been coveted by various forces during the last few centuries...

During the Federation, the despotic government of Haile Selassie extended its oppressive rule to Eritrea. The peoples of the region who had fought 'to get rid of colonial rule and live in freedom with the motherland', were stripped of their democratic rights, and step by step were put under the yoke of feudalism and imperialism. This created a favourable situation for those forces opposed to the unity of the Ethiopian people. It was obvious that, as the oppression continued to increase, internal contradictions served as a means for external enemies to

sneak in; a movement for separation that was started by the colonial rulers continued to grow with the help of foreign governments who had expansionist interest and envied Eritrea for its strategic importance.

From the very beginning the secessionist movement included reactionary leaders who were instruments of colonial rulers and expansionist forces interested in the strategic importance of Eritrea. As the movement grew in age, progressive groups are known to have joined it as the result of the opposition to the economic, social and political oppression perpetrated against the broad masses by feudalism and imperialism.

It is also true that there are ~~reactionary and~~ progressive groups within the movement with irreconcilable views on political questions, external relations and matters pertaining to contradictions among the people in the Eritrea region. It is an undeniable truth that the reactionary group which, for its own benefit and comfort, has become servile to the strategic interest of expansionist forces has been exploiting religious differences and contradictions among nationalities. This group had caused the loss of lives of numerous innocent Eritreans every time it launched an attack against the progressive group...

In accordance with the Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution and the repeated revolutionary calls in the past, the Provisional Military Government has made the following decisions to provide a peaceful solution to the problem in the Administrative Region of Eritrea:

DECISION

1. The anomalies which had existed before will be ~~done~~ away with and the people of the Eritrean Administrative Region will, in a new spirit and in co-operation and collaboration with the rest of the Ethiopian people, have full participation in the political, economic and social life of the country. They will in particular play their full role in the struggle to establish the People's Democratic Republic in accordance with the Programme of the Ethiopian Democratic Revolution.
2. The Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic has affirmed that the right of self-determination of nationalities can be guaranteed through regional autonomy which takes due account of objective realities prevailing in Ethiopia, her surroundings and in the world at large. To translate this into deeds, the Government will study each

of the regions of the country, the history and interactions of the nationalities inhabiting them, their geographic positions, economic structures and their suitability for development and administration. After taking these into consideration, the Government will at an appropriate time present to the people the structure of the regions that can exist in the future. The entire Ethiopian people will then democratically discuss the issue at various levels and decide upon it themselves.

3. Having realised the difficulties existing in the Administrative Region of Eritrea and the urgency of overcoming them, and in order to apply in practice the right of self-determination of nationalities on a priority basis, the Provisional Military Government is prepared to discuss and exchange views with the progressive groups and organizations in Eritrea which are not in collusion with feudalist, reactionary forces in the neighbourhood and imperialists.

4. The Government will give full support to progressives in the Eritrean Administrative Region who will, in collaboration with the progressives in the rest of Ethiopia and on the basis of the programme of the Ethiopian National

Democratic Revolution, endeavour to arouse, organise and lead the working masses of the region in the struggle against the three enemies of the Ethiopian people - feudalism, capitalism and imperialism - and thereby promote the unity of the oppressed classes of Ethiopia.

5. The Government will give all necessary assistance to those Ethiopians who, because of the absence of peace in the Eritrean Administrative Region for a long time, have been in exile in neighbouring countries and in far-off alien lands so that they may, as of today, return to their own country.

6. The Government will make a special effort in rehabilitating those Ethiopians who might have lost their property because of the adverse conditions that had existed. All those who have been dislocated from jobs and education as a result of the existing problem will be enabled to avail themselves of the employment and educational opportunities which Ethiopia can offer in any part of the country.

7. People who have been imprisoned as a result of the existing problem will be released. The cases of those who have been sentenced to life imprisonment or death will be

carefully examined and reviewed as soon as peaceful conditions are restored and, on the basis of their offences, they will either receive reduced prison terms or be altogether released.

8. The state of emergency will be lifted as soon as the major decisions begin to be implemented and peace is guaranteed in the Eritrean Administrative Region.

9. A special commission entrusted with the task of ensuring the implementation of decision 5 to 7 above will be established by proclamation.

APPENDIX III

PETITION FOR AUTONOMOUS STATUS OF LOWLAND
AREAS OF ERITREA PRESENTED

Representatives of the Lowland inhabitants of Eritrea region both at home and abroad presented a petition to President Mengistu on December 29, 1988 requesting the consideration of an autonomous status for the lowland areas of the region.

After receiving the petition from the representatives, Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam, General Secretary of the CC of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia, President of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, said that he would immediately present the petition to the National Shengo.

The petitioners, who represent 750,000 inhabitants of the autonomous region of Eritrea, who are now living in neighbouring countries, the Middle East, Europe and America as well as those in the country, have returned home in response to the peace call made to them. In their petition, the representatives requested that the lowland locality of the region be granted an autonomous status based on objective conditions and that it be accountable directly

to the central government and the National Shengo. The representatives noted the differences between the lowland and highland localities of the region in terms of language, culture, economic and social levels and between the lowland and highland inhabitants as a result of the drawbacks in the old feudal system, and indicated the need for the establishment of an autonomous locality for the lowland areas like those of the Afar and Somali nationalities.

The people of the autonomous region of Eritrea, said the representatives, have been deprived of peace because of the injustices and pressure of the secessionists. The representatives proposed that the culture, tradition as well as history and language of the people of the region be respected in accordance with the constitution. They further asked that conditions be made favourable to them so that they could struggle against the bandits alongside the heroic Revolutionary Army and the region's People's Militia until victory is fully achieved and the hopes and aspirations of the inhabitants is (sic) wholly realized.

The representatives also requested for the urgent repatriation of about 80 to 90 percent of the 750,000

Eritreans, most of them displaced from the lowland areas of the region by the atrocious acts committed by the bandits, as well as for the advance preparations and favourable conditions to be made in the creation of job opportunities, arrangements of transportation and resettlement programme of the repatriated persons.

They identified the basic question of the Eritrean people not as the question of independence or secession or federation, but as the exercise of their rights for self-administration, as given to all nationalities of the country by the constitution. They pointed out that the terrorists who wage a proxy war in the region do not represent the people of the autonomous Eritrean region.

The representatives reminded some involved countries to halt their financial, material and political support to the anti-people and anti-peace elements and divert their support to the people. They explained that the people of Eritrea have the earnest wish for the restoration of peace in the region and to reach a balanced development status with people in other parts of the country. The representatives said they had realised that no better way can be found other than the favourable conditions created by the constitution

to find a peaceful and political solution to the Eritrean problem.

Disclosing that he would present the petition to the National Shengo, Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam said that the sole and typical aim for which the Ethiopian Revolution stands is to safeguard the unity of the people and to help democracy flourish as the right of the people. The General Secretary also explained to the representatives that it is the wish of the broad masses to see the conclusion of the struggle with the anti-people and anti-unity elements in Eritrea region with victory for peace-loving and democratic forces.

Assuring the representatives that the Ethiopian broad masses rally on the side of those nationals who reside abroad and who are dedicated to peace, democracy and justice, Comrade Mengistu took the opportunity to reiterate the call on elements who had been misled by certain quarters to struggle for true freedom, unity and development rather than slavery, secession and destruction.

In accordance with Comrade Mengistu's assurance, the Politbureau of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia met on January 3, 1989 to consider the plea by the lowland Eritreans that a new autonomous region be carved out from Eritrea. The Politbureau, after having discussed the question, agreed to present the case to the National Shengo (National Assembly).

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APPENDIX IV

THE EPLF REFERENDUM PROPOSAL, 22 NOVEMBER 1980

Although the Eritrean revolution has repeatedly reaffirmed its genuine readiness to find a peaceful political solution for the Eritrean question, the Ethiopian regime's unwillingness to seek a peaceful solution and its strivings to crush the Eritrean revolution through active military force and diplomatic conspiracy have doomed all endeavours to failure. Besides, at times when several governments, supporting the correct, democratic and just principle of the right to self-determination, attempted to bring about a genuine peaceful solution, others have created obstacles by trying to impose incorrect and unjust solutions. Thus, there has been no successful or fruitful initiative as yet. For this reason, the killing and suffering of the Eritrean people have not ceased and no stability and peace secured.

Having recognised and assessed these facts, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) would like to present the following important proposal.

First, to bring about a peaceful political solution for the Eritrean question, hold a referendum in Eritrea in

accordance with the just, democratic and correct principle of the right of peoples to self-determination;

Second, to implement the first point, set up an international commission acceptable to the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean revolution. Its composition would be subject to discussion and could be formed from the UN, the OAU, the Arab League or the Non-Aligned Movement;

Third, reach agreement on a ceasefire and declare it before holding the referendum, and the commission to be set up in accordance with the second point shall monitor and oversee the ceasefire;

Fourth, from the moment the ceasefire is declared up to the time the referendum is completed, both the Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean revolution should have the freedom to carry out political agitation in all zones where there are Eritreans, with all acts of forcible imposition of views prohibited for both sides so the people may express their views with complete freedom;

Fifth, the time, place, procedure of registration and method of voting, to be determined and formulated by the commission, are to be announced;

Sixth, voting should be based on the following three points:

1. For full independence;
2. For federal association with Ethiopia;
3. For regional autonomy;

Seventh, for any outcome, the Eritrean people should freely elect their representatives and establish an independence state or administration through a constituent assembly.

That this proposal embodies the shortest, best and most reliable road to the peaceful political resolution of the Eritrean question is beyond doubt. Through this declaration, the EPLF calls upon all forces who wish to achieve a peaceful solution for the Eritrean question, support the right to self-determination, and fight for democracy and justice, to contribute their unswerving effort to translate this proposal into action.

Appendix V

EPLF Statement Calling on the UN to
Supervise a Referendum in Eritrea

Whereas in the post WW II period, the Eritrean people, who were finally free from the Italian colonial rule, fell victim to the global strategic considerations of the U.S and its allies and, denied of the right to self-determination, were forced into a 'feudal' shackle with Ethiopia against their expressed wishes.

Whereas the Eritrean people embarked on a legitimate armed struggle after their democratic political resistance to the unjust 'federal' shackle and their efforts to secure their right by peaceful means met with violent suppression by the Haile Selassie regime and silence from the international community.

Whereas the Haile Selassie regime, banking on the opportunities open to it by the 'federal' arrangement and encouraged by an international political climate favourable to its design, declared - in 1962 - Eritrea as part of Ethiopia, in violation of the UN 'federal' plan and that, when this happened, the UN failed to shoulder its responsibility and annul this illegal act.

Whereas in the period 1961-1974, the Eritrean people suffered repeated massacres and large scale displacement in the hands of the Haile Selassie regime which, with the backing of the US and its allies, attempted to strangle the just struggle of the Eritrean people by pursuing a scorched-earth policy. Whereas with the fall of H. Selassie and the coming to power of the Military (the Dergue) and the intervention of the USSR and its allies the sufferings of the Eritrean people reached unprecedented levels; whereas the UN bears responsibility for the terrible plight of the Eritrean people.

Whereas the Eritrean People have made their aspiration clear to the World by persisting - against all odds - in their just struggle for self-determination for nearly 50 years; the last 29 years with arms in hand.

Whereas the preliminary peace talks held in 1977/78 under East German mediation failed because of the intransigence of the Dergue and the treachery and duress of the United Socialist Party of Germany .

On November 20, 1980, the EPLF issued its referendum proposal for a peaceful solution of the Eritrean case; a proposal for which there is no alternative.

The 1982-1985 preliminary talks which the EPLF entered into on the basis of its referendum proposal and with a view to creating a climate conducive to negotiations reached a dead end because the Dergue rejected the principle of unconditional, publicly declared talks in the presence of observers.

The talks which started last year at the initiative of former President Carter too have come to a fruitless end because the Dergue, capitalizing complications created by President Carter, obstructed the participation of all observers.

7. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front:

A) Reaffirming that the Eritrean case is not an internal affair of the colonial annexationist Addis Ababa regime, but the case of self-determination of a distinct people, a case that has been suppressed and neglected for 50 years and towards which the international community bears responsibility.

B) Reaffirming categorically that the efforts at reform and prescriptions for solution that the annexationist Addis Abeba regime and advocates of its imperial and expansionist policies are toying with are illegal and unacceptable.

C) Reminding all concerned that the presence of the armed forces of the Addis Abeba regime and other foreign powers in Eritrea is illegal and demanding their evacuation.

D) Calls on the UN, as the representative of the international community and the body legally responsible for the Eritrean case, to supervise a referendum in Eritrea as the indispensable means for a just and peaceful solution on the basis of the basic rights of the Eritrean people to self-determination.

Eritrean People's Liberation Front
May 8, 1990

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Appendix VI

Memorandum from American Consul, James
Forrestal, to the Secretary of State on the
Strategic importance of Eritrea, 11 December,
1948.

11 DEC 1948

DEC 13 1948

MR. SATTERTHWAITTE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

From the standpoint of strategic and logistical considerations it would be of value to the United States to have refineries, capable of supplying a substantial portion of our aviation needs, located close to a crude supply and also close to areas where naval task forces would be operating and where airfields would be located, yet far enough removed to be reasonably safe from effective enemy bombing.

With respect to the Middle East, refineries located in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea would meet the foregoing conditions provided prospective development of adequate crude supply for these refineries also reasonably safe from effective enemy bombing, is realized. Therefore, as a long-range provision of potential military value, it is believed that concessions or rights should be sought for United States interests to construct and operate refineries in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea. These rights should include necessary transportation and port concessions, together with air and naval base rights and communication facilities.

It would appear that demands by our probable enemies for concessions of like nature would be invited if effort were made by the United States to include the matter of concessions to us in prospective United Nations agreements for the disposition of former Italian colonies. This would obviously be undesirable from the military viewpoint. It would, however, be satisfactory from the military viewpoint, if the matter could be handled by separate agreement with friendly nations desiring control of Italian Somaliland and Eritrea.

In view of the fact that these concessions or rights, if granted, may never be utilized, the United States Government is not justified at this time in making any commitments either factually or implied in return for these concessions.

Sincerely yours,

Forrestal

James Forrestal

The Honorable

The Secretary of State

DEC 20 1948

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SECRET

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QUESTIONNAIRE MAILED TO ERITREAN OFFICIALS

Name (optional)

Organisation:

Rank/Position in the Organisation:

1. When did your organisation/unit come into existence?
2. What are the functions of the organisation/unit?
3. What were the main objectives of the organisation/unit? Have there been changes over the years?
4. Do you operate from foreign bases? (You may wish to name the countries). If no, why not?

5. From the onset, did your organisation consider external support crucial to your objectives? If yes, what kinds of external support did you envisage? If no, why not?
6. What efforts either (or both) in your personal and official capacities have you made to solicit external support and what were the results?
7. What international organisations does your organisation belong to? For how long and what is the basis of your membership?
8. Has your organisation received/and do you still receive external assistance and from what sources? What kinds of assistance have you received (military/diplomatic/financial). Are these forms of assistance still coming? If no, why?
9. What efforts have you made to solicit support in Africa and what have been the payoffs and problems?
10. What is your relationship with neighbouring countries like Sudan and Somalia?

11. What has been and what is now your relationship with Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Iraq.
12. Does your struggle have ramifications for the Arab-Israeli struggle? Specifically, what is your position regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict? Do you think your struggle has affected the positions of the main actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict vis-a-vis the Eritrean cause?
13. Specifically, how would you describe your relationship with the following countries.

Cordial Strained Cold Antagonistic

USSR

CUBA

USA

(Tick the appropriate description
You may wish to give reasons for your
description).

14. What efforts have you made to settle the conflict peacefully and what are the results?
15. Do you envisage any role for the international community (particularly organisation like the OAU and UNO) in the resolution of the conflict?
16. Briefly, what is your recipe for the resolution of the conflict?

Please, give any other relevant information you consider useful to my enquiry but for which no room was made in the questionnaire.

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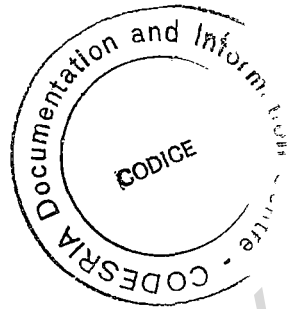
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