Eritrea

Population: 4.1 million
Life expectancy: 56 years
National capital: Asmara
Independence from Ethiopia: 27 May 1993
(formerly the Eritrea Autonomous Region)

Ethiopia

Population: 64.1 million
Life expectancy: 45
National capital: Addis Ababa
Oldest independent country in Africa

Abstract

Eritrea was an Italian colony for sixty years prior to becoming united to Ethiopia in a Federation from 1952 until 1962. Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962 arguing that the country was part of Ethiopia before Italian colonization. Eritreans waged a thirty years war of liberation against Ethiopia in the course of which they denied any historical links with Ethiopia, which they perceived as another colonial force. However, until the end of the Cold War, most members of the international community were not receptive to the demand for Eritrea's independence. Ethiopia also faced challenges from other centrifugal forces in addition to being involved in inter-state conflicts that intensified during the military dictatorship of 1974-1991. One outcome of military rule and these conflicts was a very large number of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees including political refugees in neighbouring countries and beyond. These developments in Ethiopia and Eritrea contributed to and were influenced by the broader context of the Cold War and heightened politicization of ethnicity, religion and regionalism in the Horn of Africa.

The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict

Zenebeworke Tadesse

Introduction

The explanation of and the solution to the sudden outbreak of a conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia require an exploration of the historical legacy and the contemporary trajectories of the two countries.

What distinguishes the long and devastating conflict from similar conflicts elsewhere is the minimal efforts towards a negotiated settlement of the conflicts. In the 1970s and 80s, the handful of secret negotiations organized by third parties failed to even agree on an agenda for discussion. The US brokered peace talks which were to take place in London in 1991 to discuss the ending of the various conflicts and power-sharing arrangements in post military Ethiopia, "coincided" with the fall of the military regime in Ethiopia. The meeting that did take place was that of a coalition of winners.

Shortly after, the Democratic and Peaceful Transition Conference of Ethiopia was held in Addis Ababa in July 1991 and agreed on the Transition Charter and the holding of a referendum in Eritrea within two years. The conference is remembered for its brevity and the many voices it excluded from contributing to the reconstruction of a peaceful Ethiopia and Eritrea. In April 1993, a UN-sponsored referendum was held following which Eritrea become an independent state with the full blessing of the EPRDF government. Observers described the evolving relationships between the ruling parties of the two countries as "surprisingly cordial", which had opened a "new chapter of cooperation and interdependence".[1] Eritrea's freedom was also perceived as "the linchpin for stability and peace in the Horn" of Africa (Shepherd 1993). The sudden

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[1] See the essay by Eyob (1997) and the edited book by Tekle (1994).

outbreak, intensity, and duration of the recent war thus came as a surprise both to the local and world community.

Agents

The principal parties in the current conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea are illustrated in the following Table. It is important to note, however, that the unfolding conflict has reactivated other relatively dormant parties, as well as triggered the realignment of opposition forces in the Horn of Africa region. Table I includes the broader array of parties that are currently broadening the outreach of the conflict or have the potential to do so, especially if the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is not resolved immediately or escalates.

Parties to the Conflict

Acronym	Name	Established	Represents	Affiliation	Support	Conflict with
TPLF	Tigrean People's Liberation Movement	In 1975, and one of the major parties which overthrew the military government	Tigrayan ethnic Group and is the hegemonic party in the ruling coalition.	Initiated the formation of EPRDF	Party owns numerous business enterprises	PFDJ
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolution-ary Democratic Front	In 1989, presided over the Peace talks of 1991 which established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and has been the ruling party since then	Pro-government ethnic- based parties which claim to represent the numerous ethnic groups in the country		Until the breakout of the conflict ,enjoyed the support of most Western Countries and recently Djibouti and the Sudan	Eritrea-EPLF/PFDJ Internal opposition groups: OLF AAPO and CEOPO; Somali Groups: Itihad "Illegal" ONLF
EPLF/	Eritrean Peoples liberation Front became People's Front for Democracy and Justice	1971 and changed its name and structure to PFDJ in 1994.	The governing and only "mass-based" organization alleged to have a predominantly Christian membership		Enjoyed support and sympathy from the international community, Libya and alleged support from Egypt	Ethiopia (EPRDF): EIJM; Sudan - National Islamic Front (NIF) Djibouti; EOFA:

EIJ	**Eritrean Islamic Jihad**	**1988**	**Represents Eritrean Moslems membership mostly based on Eritrean refugees in the Sudan**	**A coalition of four other organizations**	**Alleged support from Sudan's National Islamic Front**	**EPLF/PFDJ**
Elf/ EOFA	**Eritrean Liberation Front Eritrean Opposition Fronts Alliance**	**1961 ousted from Eritrea in 1981 and been operating in exile in various countries and is split into numerous splinter groups until the 1999 alliance**	**Mostly Eritrean Moslems believed to be half of the population**	**ELF had at least three splinter groups. The alliance is made up of ten different Eritrean organizations. Major uniting factor is the Islamic religion and its role in the Eritrean polity.**	**A number of Islamic countries presently appears close with the Ethiopian Government**	**EPLF/PFDJ**
OLF	**Oromo Liberation Movement**	**1976**	**Fighting for the succession of the Oromo ethnic group and the establishment of an independent Oromia**	**Was loosely affiliated with TPLF and EPLF in the 1980s and joined the Transitional Government of Ethiopia until its withdrawal from the election of 1992**	**Alleged support from the Eritrean Government and Borana community in Kenya and the "illegal" Ogaden National Liberation Front**	**EPRDF/ Ethiopian Government**

In the Ethiopian context of a highly repressive and centralized military regime, the response of most opposition groups was the use of ethnicity as a force for political mobilization. Hence the EPLF, TPLF, OLF operating in the countryside drew support from particular territories or ethnicities. Moreover, despite their disparate objectives, they were able to make tactical alliances in order to overthrow the military regime (Young 1996).

The two principle parties in the current conflict are the EPRDF, and the EPLF/PFDJ. In addition to the EPLF the major and sustained challenge to military rule was put up by TPLF. The TPLF which is an ethnic organization representing a small ethnic group formed an umbrella party composed of satellite ethnic parties and became the EPRDF whereas PFDJ is a single party and a pan-Eritrean organization. The tactical alliance that the two parties forged during the liberation struggle, and the interdependence, which

continued after the two parties assumed power in Ethiopia and Eritrea, belied the historical contradictions between Tigray and Eritrea and the tensions between the two parties during the time of the liberation movement. Tigray and Eritrea share contingent territories, language and culture. However, they also have had moments of adversarial relations both before and after Eritrea's colonization. The major antagonism between the two fronts was related to the right of nationalities to self-determination. Unlike the EPLF, the TPLF recognizes the legitimacy of this right in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. There was a break in the alliance of the two parties between 1985-1988 over this contentious issue (Young 1996, 535). These tensions resurfaced when the two states chose different paths in reconstructing their political systems.

Persistent features of the political history of these liberation movements include coming to power through the elimination of rivals, the politics of exclusion and the command mode of operation. The post liberation period has not yet witnessed a shift to peaceful dialogue, power sharing and consensual politics.[2]

On coming to power the ruling parties in Ethiopia and Eritrea took divergent paths in the reconstruction of the state. While the Ethiopian path can be classified as the uncritical celebration of ethnicity (Olukoshi & Laakso 1997, 28), the ruling party in Eritrea perceived "ethnic and religious identities as a debilitating force whose political expression was congenitally detrimental" (Foud1996, 482) to nation building. Marking a significant break from the pan-Ethiopian agenda of the past, the EPRDF has been restructuring the Ethiopian State on the basis of "self-governing ethnic communities".

Meanwhile Eritrea has been engaged in the creation of multi-ethnic administrative regions with a view to weakening territorially based ethnic politicization. Another significant difference is the proliferation of political, mostly ethnic-based parties in Ethiopia as opposed to "a disdainful distrust of parties in Eritrea" (Ëyob 1997). However, in spite of the formal existence of multi-party politics in Ethiopia, some parties

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[2] See for example, Eyob (1997) in reference to the Eritrean Front but her observation is applicable to all the agents in the current conflict.

have been barred from operating in Ethiopia. The electoral law makes it almost impossible to form multi-ethnic opposition parties in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the activities of the legal and ethnic-based opposition parties have been restricted and their leaders and members are imprisoned for "fomenting ethnic dissent" (Joireman 1997). Both banned Ethiopian opposition parties as well as Eritrean opposition parties operate from exile. In the case of the latter, most of the opposition operates from the Sudan Causes of Antagonism. The apparent cause of the current conflict is a border dispute. When Eritrea become independent, the borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia were not delineated. Ironically it was while a high delegation which was mandated to resolve mutual territorial claims on the undemarcated border was holding talks in early May of 1998 that an Eritrean mechanized tank brigade accompanied by heavy artillery moved into the town known as Badime. The Ethiopian government demanded the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the disputed area prior to any peace negotiations.

It is widely believed that the real causes of the continued antagonism are located in economic, political and historical factors. Of particular significance is the persistence of a political culture, which celebrates the use of violence as a tool for acquiring or defending political power in both countries and the Horn of Africa region as a whole. The Ethiopian population is steeped in the long tradition of territorial defense. Eritrea's independence rendered Ethiopia a land-locked country. There are many vocal forces who never accepted the legitimacy of Eritrea's independence and who call for the return of the status quo ante. Prior to the current conflict, the government in Ethiopia discouraged such views. Presently, such views are enjoying a free rein.

During the 30 years liberation struggle, pan-Eritrean nationalism emerged as anti-Ethiopian nationalism. The victory over the military regime was interpreted as a victory over the Ethiopian people. The current conflict is portrayed as a revival of Ethiopian expansionist tendency. Pointing to the conflicts that Eritrea has engaged in with Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti and now Ethiopia in the last four years, the Ethiopian government and informed public point to Eritrean hegemonistic ambitions in the Horn of Africa.

Motivation

As was indicated above, the root causes of the current conflict include economic and political causes. On coming to power in the early 1990s, the two regimes and relatively more the Eritrean regime inherited devastated economies and widespread poverty. Other legacies included severe forms of environmental degradation, recurrent drought, and an agricultural system, which is primarily based on rain-fed agriculture. There is thus a constant threat to food security.

Demobilization of soldiers and ex-combatants, resettlement of large number of returnees from exile as well as displaced persons were other daunting challenges faced by the two regimes. All these factors contribute to the lowering of the threshold of violence. Departing from development strategies promoted during the liberation movement, the macro-economic policies of both countries are based on the tenets of structural adjustment and market-led growth with slight modification. This has further lowered the welfare of many social groups as evidenced by the dismal social indicators in both countries. While rural land is held by the state in both countries, Eritrea has refrained from accepting external debt and heavily depends on the financial remittances of Eritreans in the diaspora including Ethiopia. In spite of generous incentives, foreign direct investment has been negligible in both countries.

A critical development resource was to emanate from "Agreements of Friendship and Cooperation"[3] between the two countries in conflict. Of great significance was the agreement on the elimination of all trade barriers between the two countries, harmonization of customs policies, the use by Ethiopia of Assab and Massawa as free ports and the use of the Ethiopian Birr as the common currency until Eritrea issues its own money. Equally significant was the protocol agreement on the free movement of people and the establishment of residence as well as the defence pact. The contents of the agreements were not provided to the public and used as confidence building tools.

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[3] See Tesfai, Alemseged (1999) for a selected Aspects of Post-1991 Eritrea-Ethiopian Cooperation.

In the initial phase of Eritrea's export-led development, Ethiopia's was the most likely export market. Unfortunately, both Ethiopia and Eritrea manufacture similar products. The existence of large and relatively well off Eritrean entrepreneurs in Ethiopia and the nature of the trade agreement created tensions among the business community. These tensions came to a head when Eritrea issued its own currency known as the Nakfa. The authorities in Eritrea proposed that both the Nakfa and the Birr be used as legal tender in both countries, especially for bilateral settlements. And in case Ethiopia changes its currency, the stock of old Ethiopian Birr in Eritrea be converted into US dollars and considered as Ethiopia's foreign liabilities.

For their part, the Ethiopian authorities maintained that all major bilateral trade transactions between Ethiopia and Eritrea ought to be settled in US dollars and on the basis of the regular letter of credit system except for petty trade. The Eritrean government threatened a maritime embargo to which Ethiopia responded by switching the shipment of Ethiopia's import/export cargo to the port of Djibouti. This might have been an opportune moment for the involvement of international cooperation in facilitating peaceful dialogue between the two countries.

Another related and significant contributory cause of the intensity of the current conflict is related to the issue of citizenship. On assuming power in 1991, the Provisional Eritrean Government expelled 200,000 Ethiopians and Eritrean women married to Ethiopians from Eritrea (GTZ 1992). The Transitional government of Ethiopia treated the matter as a non-event and repressed public protest. However, public resentment of this suppressed event was a major cause of antagonism between the two peoples especially in the border regions between the two countries. Ethiopian law prohibits dual citizenship to its nationals. However, following the Referendum in 1993, an estimated one million Eritreans, the majority of whom voted for independence chose to stay in Ethiopia and enjoyed the same citizenship rights like other Ethiopians.

The Ethiopian government did not take any legal steps to clarify potential problems with

holding a dual citizenship by the Eritrean community in Ethiopia. With hindsight, the observations that "the Ethiopian government saw them as strong allies in its own struggle against its opposition"[4] seem to be accurate. Following the outbreak of the current conflict, an estimated 52,000 Eritreans and approximately 40,000 Ethiopians were subjected to expulsion.[5] Beyond the numbers and the human rights implications, this expulsion signifies the deepening antagonism between the peoples of the two countries who have lived relatively peacefully even during the long civil war. The absence of a vibrant civil society has hampered attempts to initiate peaceful dialogue between the people of the two countries. Facilitating dialogue between the civil society groups in the two countries ought to be seen as a priority area of international cooperation.

In a recent interview on the causes of the conflict, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is quoted as saying "before May 6, we had many disputes on many subjects, very serious ones." He went on to say that the two countries "had categorically different visions but all these issues have been solved through negotiations".[6] What the continuing war indicates is that these many disputes were underplayed, and far from resolved in the quest for the consolidation of state power by the two principal agents. What is most certain is that the public in both countries had had no role in holding informed discussion nor in the negotiated solutions. Sectors of the population who were affected by the many serious disputes were forced to suppress their grievances.

Thus far, the major lesson emerging from the Ethiopian-Eritrea conflict is the high cost of the lack of transparency and accountability in relations between state and society. Buoyed by the euphoria of military victory and the absence of countervailing forces, both countries failed to establish a process of democratic resolution of conflicts through rational and democratic deliberations. In Ethiopia, the limited opening towards democracy, for example, the emergent free press, very weak but vocal opposition parties has made it possible to call for transparency. But the rapprochement between Ethiopian

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[4] See, for example, Tesfai, Alemseged (1998).
[5] There is no reliable data on the number of expelled people from both countries as it has become a component part of the propaganda war and appeal for support of this or the other side from the international community.
[6] Agence Press, 2 February, 1999.

intellectuals, [7] the exile opposition, and the state have muted these calls. The upcoming national elections in the year 2000 are most likely to renew the call for leadership accountability and the politics of inclusion.

However, the process is hampered by the lack of a political culture that promotes political bargaining and consensus building. In Eritrea, the highly centralized single party state with its emphasis on national unity through the repression of ethnic and religious differences and most importantly the nurturing of the "endemic culture of public silence" (Eyob 1997, 658) has contributed to the intensity and the continuation of the conflict. But observers believe that the current war although horrible is likely to raise hard public questions centered on leadership accountability and it "may have opened up a rhetorical space for an alternative nationalism." (Mesfin 1999, 16)

Instruments

Most of the available information on the size of troops, types of arms being purchased and war casualties. According to US official estimates, Ethiopia began the war with about 250,000 troops and Eritrea with about 200,000 and both were exceptionally well armed. The outbreak of the conflict has led to the recalling of demobilized soldiers and intensified efforts at new recruitment. The conflict was billed as "the first high-tech war in Africa" but the actual fighting has been a combination of modern and trench warfare based on the use of mass human wave battlefield strategy. It is estimated that in four days of fighting, up to 40,000 soldiers on both sides were killed or wounded in the battle of Badme. [8] The overall number of casualties since the start of the fighting and the number of people displaced by the continued fighting is unacceptably high by any standards. Compared with the Kosovo crisis, the attention given to the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict by the international community has been minimal.

Both sides use the media including cyberspace as a major means of rallying public and

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[7] See, for example, Zewde (1999, 16).
[8] "Ethiopia and Eritrea: Trench Warfare" *The Economist*, March 13th 1999

global support. The most powerful medium is the radio and the revival of old and new myths of antagonism and both sides celebrating their glorious histories of united resistance in the face of foreign aggression.

Both countries are supporting each other's opposition movements. The conflict has also reactivated the process that Anderson called "long distance nationalism" through the use of the Internet. In addition to generating bitter legacies, the meager resources of both countries have been increasingly diverted to defence purposes thereby reducing their capacities to implement urgently needed social and economic policies.

One of the legacies of the Cold War are Soviet-made weapons which were left behind by the military dictatorship. These included MiG 21 and MiG – 23 fighters. Prior to the conflict, the US has provided non-lethal military aid in the form of communication equipment and transport planes to Eritrea and Ethiopia as part of its policy to contain the National Islamic Front government in Khartoum. Since May both sides have been buying additional tanks, arms and ammunition, anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines as a well as a disturbing array of new types of arms. Recent reports include the purchase of helicopter gunships and attack helicopters and planes with ground attack capabilities by both countries. These include the purchase of "Sukhoi 27 fighters" by Ethiopia and communication equipment and MiG-29 interceptors by Eritrea.

These supplies have been bought from Russia, Bulgaria, China, Italy and France. Furthermore, these planes are being flown and maintained by pilots from Russia, Ukraine or Latvia as the two sides do not have pilots who are qualified to run the new planes. As most of these new equipment require advanced cash payments, both sides have intensified their fund raising efforts. Eritrea is reported to be getting funds from Libya, the Gulf particularly Qatar A substantive amount of funds is pledged from Eritreans in the diaspora as well as the sale of treasury bonds and raffling of houses in Asmara. Ethiopia has increased its military budget, collects donations from the local population in cash in kind, and has begun collecting money from Ethiopians abroad. It is not yet possible to make an accurate estimate of the ongoing conflict but for two of the poorest

countries in the world, guesstimates of over a million dollars a day without including the cost of equipment, pilots, and technicians is staggering.[9]

The Search for Peace

Efforts at peace mediation by external forces took two years due to historical antecedents as well as new global strategic alignments in the post cold war period. The leaders of Eritrea were bitter at institutions such as the OAU and the UN and most of the international community for not having recognized the legitimacy of their independence struggle prior to their winning the war in 1991. For example, Eritrea's response to a mediation offer by the OAU during the conflict with Sudan in 1995 was that "the Eritrean government does not believe in the effectiveness of the OAU mechanism for conflict prevention and management".[10]

Initial efforts at mediation were taken by the United States a country that had revived its close relations with both Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1990s. Having classified Sudan a terrorist state, the US made some provisions that would strengthen the military capability of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. In addition to efforts at bilateral negotiations, the US, the European Union and other donors have provided assistance to the OAU and other sub-regional organizations with a view to improving their conflict resolution capabilities.

 In June 1998, the United States brokered a moratorium on air strikes which was agreed by both parties but following an intensive propaganda warfare and intermittent exchange of artillery fire, the fighting resumed in February after the failure of diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. The major diplomatic effort is the OAU peace framework. It calls for the deployment of peacekeepers and neutral delineation of the border preceded by an Eritrean withdrawal from the disputed region on the Western Front. It also provided for the sixth-month deployment of a peacekeeping and observer force and neutral delineation of the border. It also calls for the restoration of the Ethiopian administration, which had

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[9] The section of types of equipment and cost estimates in taken from the article by Gilkes (1999).
[10] Indian Ocean Newsletter (1995) October 28.

been in Badme region before the Eritrean offensive last May. In addition to the demilitarization of the contested areas that would be controlled by the peacekeepers, the plan demanded a halt to massive expulsions by each country of the other's nationals. While Ethiopia accepted the OAU framework, Eritrea postponed its acceptance until late February following the recapture of Badme by Ethiopian forces. This, however, did not lead to a ceasefire. Following the renewed fighting, the UN passed a resolution[11] demanding an immediate end to the hostilities, in particular the use of air strikes and "strongly urging states to end immediately all sales of arms and munitions to Ethiopia and Eritrea." Nevertheless, the resolution failed short of a binding embargo like those imposed in other African conflicts. It is important to note that four of the UN Security Council members have been selling arms to the two countries in the conflict. Both countries have rejected the resolution and many countries continue to ignore the voluntary arms embargo.

A year after the formulation of "Framework Agreement, the 1999 OAU summit in Algiers, the "Modalities" for implementing the agreement was submitted for consideration by the two parties followed by the "Technical Arrangements" another implementation document. While both countries accepted the framework and the modalities, Ethiopia had problems with the "Technical Arrangement" alleging that the document does not fully guarantee a return to the status quo ante and that it included elements that undermined the role of the OAU in the peace process. Whereas the original framework document which recommended the deployment of OAU military observers, the technical arrangement recommended setting up a UN peacekeeping mission. There followed a long stalemate in peace efforts and a lull in the fighting for several months although there was a clear intensification of the propaganda war, with long-term implications for future relations between the two countries and peoples. In the meantime, both countries faced a severe drought and alarming food insecurity.

Hostilities resumed in May 2000 during which heavy fighting broke out on the common border. The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on both countries but the

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[11] United Nations Security Resolution 1227 article 2 and Article 7.

fighting continued until Ethiopia took back all the disputed territories. The renewed conflict led to massive loss of life and displacements of very large numbers of people in both countries. In June, both countries signed a ceasefire. While Ethiopia maintains its army in the disputed areas, Eritrean forces had to withdrew from a 25 kilometre buffer zone inside their own territory to make way for the peacekeepers. The peace accord anticipates the deployment of 4200 UN peacekeepers known as the United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in a temporary zone of security. The second and critical step entails the demarcation of the borders. However, the deployment of the peacekeepers appears to have been delayed.

The war of words has not abated and the humanitarian crisis is worsening in both countries. Both countries seem to be determined to give disproportionate attention to the military and militarization at the expense of other development priorities. The decision by most bilateral donors to suspend development assistance is likely to have a significant impact on the aid dependent development process as well as on state-civil society relations.

The conflicts have had both regional and sub-regional consequences. At the regional level, the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict and that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region has led to the demise of US policy and its celebration of the "New African" leadership for the new millennium. Having identified themselves as common victims of Eritrean aggression, Sudan and Ethiopia are in the process of normalizing their strained relations. Djibouti has become the major conduit for Ethiopian trade. However, there are reports that the Eritrean government has been placing land mines around the port of Djibouti as well as providing assistance to (FRUD), the principal opposition movement in Djibouti.[12] A clear victim of the Ethiopian-Eritrea conflict is the peace process in Somalia as both Ethiopia and Eritrea have begun arming rival Somali factions.

Presently, most attention is focused on the implementation of the ceasefire. Other types

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[12] Gilkes (1999) "The War's Bitter Legacy"

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of assistance that the international community could give include strengthening of the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) particularly its capacity to devise innovative, context specific and sustainable development programs for the sub-region. The facilitation of the participation of civil society groups in IGADD deliberation and in its activities would be another area worthy of consideration. Another crucial input is the non-partisan documentation of the human rights abuses committed by both parties with recommendations of just and feasible solutions of these abuses. The finding can then be used to support public awareness and commitment to international humanitarian law. A sustainable peace requires the promotion of an array of measures that support internal forces that are struggling to bring about democratic governance in each of the countries of the Horn.

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Chronology

July 1991: The Peace and Democracy Conference organized by the EPRDF which had assumed power following the demise of the military government. It was attended by 28 parties most of whom were formed between May and July and formally or informally affiliated to the ruling party. The ruling party in Eritrea attended the Conference as an observer. Expulsion of 200,000 Ethiopians from Eritrea including Eritrean women and children.

1992: Local and regional elections preceded by polarization and fragmentation of the political process. Most of the opposition parties boycotted the elections. International observers noted that that the election was neither "free" nor "fair".

1991-1993: Establishment of   relationship between EPRDF and EPLF

April 1993: The Eritrean Referendum with over 98% support for independence. The Ethiopian government facilitated the Voting for residents in Addis. There were no discussions on citizenship rights of the Eriterean population who remained in Ethiopia. In the context of SAP and retrenchment, and a generally punitive environment for those who were members of the single party under military rule and most importantly the demobilization of the previous army and its office core, full citizenship rights including voting, government employment and an enabling environment for Eritrean private entrepreneurs generated tensions and suppressed resentments among many different sectors of the urban population.

1994: Eritrea and Sudan engage in open hostility over the activities of the Eritrean Islamic Jihad whose membership is mostly drawn from Eritrean refugees in Sudan. In retaliation Eritrea allows the National Democratic alliance, a Sudanese opposition group to open an office and to broadcast radio transmissions to the Sudan. The US government also provided assistance to this group.

1995: National and regional election in Ethiopia again boycotted by most of the legally registered opposition parties.

1997: Eritrea began exploring various payment options subsequent to the issuing of its own currency.

1997: Ethiopia introduced a new Ethiopian Birr and Eritrea issued its own currency known as the Nakffa and the two countries disagreed on the issue of convertibility of the two currencies.

1997-1998: There were signs of growing tensions between the two countries

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May 1998: Eritrean troops occupied Badme. The Ethiopian government stated that it would not engage in any peace talk until Eritrea withdrew from the contested territory.

May 1998: The US tried to mediate between the two countries as did a number of EU countries.

May-June 1998: Intensive propaganda war started by both sides.

June 1998: Eritrea bombed a civilian target killing school children and subsequently some parents who came to the school to fetch the children. Ethiopia retaliated by bombing the Asmara airport

June 1998: The US brokered a moratorium on air strikes which was agreed by both sides but expulsions of large numbers of people from both countries resumed at a faster pace and the propaganda war was intensified.

November 1998: The OAU put forth an 11 point Peace Framework which Ethiopia accepted but Eritrea procrastinated to sign. Most of the international community endorsed the OAU Framework as the best hope for peace and as a starting point for negotiation. Both countries were purchasing arms and intensifying military preparation

December 1998-January 1999: Numerous delegations tried to convince the two countries to abandon the arms build up and to come to the negotiating table.

February 1999: The two countries engaged in heavy fighting and Ethiopia took back Badme. Eritrea agreed to the OAU Peace proposals but the expected ceasefire has not yet taken place. The February fighting resulted in heavy causalities for both sides and intensified the magnitude of displacement.

June 1999: The OAU Summit endorsed the "Modalities" for the implementation of the framework agreement.

July 1999: An OAU technical committee submitted the "Technical Agreements" another implementation document. Ethiopia refused to sign these later agreements sticking to its argument that the documents do not respect the status quo ante which was agreed upon in the "Framework Agreements."

May 2000: Hostilities resumed during which heavy fighting broke out on the common border.

18 May, 2000: The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on both countries but fighting continued until Ethiopia took back all the contested territories by the end of the month.

18 June, 2000: Both countries signed a Ceasefire Accord ending the two-year border war and accepting the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops until the disputed border is marked.