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Chapter 2

Understanding the Dynamics of Foreign Policy-Making in a New State: The Case of Eritrea

Tanja R. Müller

Introduction

Three watershed events have transformed African foreign policies since the late nineteenth century. These are the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which put an end to independent Africa (except for Liberia and Ethiopia) and made African foreign policy the domain of the European colonial powers; the end of colonial rule, which started with the independence of Libya in 1951 and gave Africans formal control over their international relations; and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and with it, the end of the Cold War (Schraeder 1996). As concerns Eritrea, the second and third of these watersheds occurred together. In fact, the end of the Cold War and the New World Order envisioned in its wake, resting upon principles of justice, freedom and respect for human rights (Frankland and Noble 1996, 401), facilitated the end of Ethiopian colonial rule in Eritrea. It was a combination of the military successes of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the end of the Cold War which paved the way for the recognized independence of Eritrea (Frankland and Noble 1996; Okbazghi 1987). In the meantime, what could well become a fourth watershed occurred: the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 (9/11), and in their wake a war on international terrorism proclaimed by the United States (U.S.) government.

The international environment when Eritrea became formally independent in 1993, after a thirty-year liberation struggle against Ethiopia that was coupled with a popular revolution, was thus characterized by different and at times contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, Eritrea gained statehood during a period in which several authoritarian regimes were being replaced by newly elected democratic leaders. This "second independence" (Joseph 1991) is believed to have altered domestic as well as African foreign policies. Whereas the majority of the first generation of African presidents often pursued foreign policies strongly tied to the former colonial powers, a new generation of African leaders

is seen as more likely to pursue independent policies (Schraeder 1996). At the same time, the Cold War's end increased Africa's marginalization within a globalizing economy (Wright 1999; see also Korany 1986). In the new global order of neo-liberalism, the orthodox conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank—which are largely accepted and promoted by the major Western powers, and aim to facilitate and institutionalize the liberalization of African economic and political systems—allow African states only limited room to determine their own economic priorities.

The Eritrean nation-building effort, inclusive of a proactive foreign policy, is therefore unfolding in a challenging international environment. The Horn of Africa remains one of the most economically marginalized regions in the global economic system, embodying extraordinary levels of intra-state violence and shifting regional alliances that threaten not only governments but the survival of states themselves (Woodward 1996, 1). In addition, whereas lack of superpower interest has been the norm in most of Africa from the 1960s onwards, the Horn of Africa has proven to be one of the few regional exceptions due to its strategic position. Clapham (1999, 84) correctly notes, for example, that the Horn has been "affected by a longer history of superpower engagement and competition than any other part of sub-Saharan Africa, and this in turn deeply affected the foreign policies of its constituent states" (see also Eikenberg 1995; Frankland and Noble 1996; Iyob 1997). This impact is particularly true as concerns the history of Eritrea, which currently finds itself front and center in Washington's "global war on terrorism" due to its long Red Sea coastline and its proximity to Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula. Eritrea thus provides a good example for the assertion advanced in this chapter that developments within the global system not only relegate African states to the role of peripheral players but at the same time offer new opportunities for these countries to reorient their foreign policies in positive and constructive ways.

This chapter will examine Eritrean foreign policy in the context of the Eritrean nation-building process. It will do so by focusing on Eritrean foreign policy priorities at the regional level (defined as comprising the countries of the Horn of Africa, the larger Eastern African region, and the Arabian Peninsula) and within a global context, including the country's position within the international political economy and the post-9/11 world order. It will be argued that strategies designed to integrate Eritrea into the international political economy were promising in the first years after independence (until 1998), and that in the long run Eritrea's mixture of self-reliant policies and taking lessons from the newly industrializing countries (NICs) in Asia (most notably Singapore) could become a way to maximize economic potential and overcome underdevelopment. Much will depend, of course, on Eritrea's relations with its neighbors in the Horn and the larger Eastern African region. So far, the balance sheet in this regard is devastating: Eritrea's failure to solve conflicts with its neighbors without reverting to armed conflicts of varying degrees of intensity, including all-out

war with Ethiopia during 1998-2000 in which tens of thousands of people died on both sides, has jeopardized many promising developments.

Any understanding of contemporary Eritrean foreign policy must by necessity draw on the historical record preceding Eritrean independence in 1993. Specifically, Eritrean foreign policy did not begin with Eritrea gaining statehood, but rather was firmly established by the extensive diplomatic network created and maintained by the EPLF during the guerrilla struggle. As Clapham (1999) has pointed out, the study of foreign policy cannot meaningfully be restricted to relations between states, but needs to include established insurgency movements and private organizations. Second, Eritrean foreign policy has to be understood in the wider historical context of the Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia's ambition to serve as a regional hegemonic power. It is within this context that Eritrea eventually emerged as a "diasporic" state after a period of prolonged contestation with its hegemonic neighbor. (For the concept of hegemonic versus diasporic states, see Lyob 2000.)

The Past: Eritrea as a Nation without a State

Within the broader context of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia has been characterized as an "indigenous imperial state" (Chazan *et al* 1992, 345), whose core area comprises the highland plateau north of Addis Ababa and includes the *kebesa*, the central highland area of Eritrea, inhabited mainly by ethnic Tigrinya, as is Ethiopia's northern province of Tigray. Imperial Ethiopia regarded the control of the "local periphery" as its "historic mission or manifest destiny" (Clapham 1984, 80). The coastal areas of Eritrea, including its ports, which served to link Ethiopia with the international economy, served as an important part of this periphery (Clapham 1999).

With the creation of the Italian colony of Eritrea in 1890 and the consent of Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II to its territorial boundaries, Ethiopia had foregone its direct access to the Red Sea.¹ At the same time, Ethiopia benefited from this late scramble within the Horn of Africa and extended its territory considerably southwards, to include virtually all areas of present-day Ethiopia which lie south of Addis Ababa (Clapham 1984). From this period of the "modern monarchy" (Lyob 2000, 660) onwards, the Ethiopian ruling elite came to see their country as the regional hegemon in the Horn of Africa.

The emergence of Eritrea as a territory with clearly defined boundaries is thus the product of Italian colonialism. Italian colonial rule brought a new socio-economic order to Eritrea and in many ways modernized Eritrean society in terms of infrastructure, industrialization, modern services and "contacts with the modern and outside world" (Longrigg 1960, 132). Eritrea became one of the most advanced nations in Africa (Firebrace and Holland 1985, 70). Another legacy of Italian colonialism was that "by centralising the territory of Eritrea in a colonial state, it has created in the people a sense of belonging to—and identification with—the territory" (Redie Bereketeab 2000, 88), a sense of "common

national destiny" among Eritreans (Bereket Habteselassie 1989, 146). As a result, when the fate of Italy's lost colonies was decided at the end of World War II, Eritrea eventually should have been granted independence, as the economic and social changes that took place under colonialism mirrored the colonial experiences of other African countries (Sorenson 1991, 302).

But Ethiopia had other ambitions. It argued that Eritrea was part of a proclaimed ancient empire of "Greater Ethiopia" (Levine 1974). Ethiopian historiography subscribes to a narrative of history that "projects a unified territory and identity into a distant past" (Sorenson 1993, 39) and thus promotes an ideology of "essential [Ethiopian] identity" (Sorenson 1991, 312), which regards Italian colonial rule over Eritrea as an artificial aberration. In addition, two Italian invasions of Ethiopia were launched from the colony of Eritrea, an unsuccessful one in 1895, which ended in the Italian defeat at Adowa, and a successful one, in terms of Italy taking control over much of Ethiopia in 1935. These two invasions left Ethiopia with "intense concern for the control of the Red Sea coast for security as well as economic reasons" (Clapham 1984, 81). Considerations of external security and control of the periphery continued to dominate Ethiopian foreign policy after liberation of the country from Italian occupation in 1941, and together served as the driving force of a hegemonic vision to bring Eritrea back into the Ethiopian fold.

At the same time, the U.S. was seeking allies in the region of the Horn, which "had been made strategically sensitive by Arab nationalism and Middle East oil" (Clapham 1999, 86), a state of affairs Ethiopia successfully used to its advantage. The U.S., in due course, secured the lease of Kagnaw Station, a military communications station in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, for twenty-five years, and in turn supported the United Nations (UN) General Assembly decision providing for the federation of the former Italian colony of Eritrea with Ethiopia.² The history of the federation was from the beginning "the history of its destruction" (Pool 1997, 10). Under the federal act Eritrea retained legislative, executive and judicial powers in domestic affairs and had its own parliament, whereas the Ethiopian government was to control defense, foreign affairs, finance and communications (including the administration of the two ports) (Imperial Ethiopian Government 1969, 191; UN 1952, 74ff). From the beginning, Ethiopia violated its terms and "stripped away the safeguards on the autonomy of Eritrea's political, social, and economic institutions" (Iyob 1997, 88), a process that culminated in the annexation of Eritrea as Ethiopia's fourteenth province in 1962.

The undermining of Eritrean autonomy and the eventual annexation of the territory were in violation of the spirit and the letter of the UN-sponsored federation (Johnson and Johnson 1981). The U.S. and the wider international community nonetheless remained silent, a function of the strategic importance of Ethiopia within the ideological setting of the Cold War (Pool 1997). Moreover, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie landed "his greatest diplomatic coup"

(Chazan *et al* 1992, 346) by placing himself at the head of the newly emerging African diplomatic order, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded in Addis Ababa in 1963. The emperor's influence was decisive in drawing up "its constituent principles in ways that suited both the old Ethiopian state and the great majority of African new ones" (Clapham 1999, 86). The key principle in the OAU charter that ensured the Ethiopian hegemonic position within the broader context of the Horn was the idea of "juridical statehood," based on the principles of respect for existing boundaries and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. This ensured that Eritrea's legitimate concerns would never be brought before either the OAU or the UN after the Ethiopian annexation.

Within Eritrea, however, estrangement from Ethiopia grew from the mid-1950s onwards. Eritrean nationalism gained support and led eventually to the emergence of the EPLF (Pool 2001; Iyob 1997). The EPLF unified Eritrean nationalists and created a national narrative based on "territorial nationalism" (Sorenson 1991, 312), which regarded Italian colonialism as a rupture or definitive break that had established a distinct identity among Eritreans (Sorenson 1993). In a prolonged armed struggle, the EPLF successfully contested Ethiopian hegemony and finally secured Eritrean independence.

Eritrea can thus be called a diasporic state (Iyob 2000) whose populations from within as well as from the diaspora were mobilized in a struggle to secure a homeland. This made territoriality the overarching concern of the Eritrean state, as is the case for diasporic states in general. (Israel, for example, which has been described as a "paradigmatic diasporic state," is still engaged in inter-state conflicts involving boundary demarcation and the establishment of buffer zones, while at the same time attempting to secure the safety of its citizens.) Eritrea prior to independence has fittingly been described as "a nation without a state" (Fengler 2001, 212). The importance of securing its territory, as discussed below, remains the major determinant in Eritrean foreign policy.

Two additional components of Eritrean foreign policy—self-reliance and regional alliances—have their roots in the period when the EPLF served as the *de facto* representative of the Eritrean people, and as such was responsible for Eritrea's relations with the wider international community. For example, although the EPLF via its humanitarian arm, the Eritrean Relief Association, maintained close links with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure access to food and medicine, the relative isolation of its base area in northern Eritrea necessitated an inward-looking strategy. This strategy emphasized that an eventual EPLF victory could only be achieved by drawing on its own strength and resources and minimizing foreign influence and dependency. Despite being born out of necessity rather than choice, this doctrine of self-reliance served the guerrilla cause well and remains present (albeit in a modified form) in Eritrean government policy today, particularly in relations with the international donor community.

One must also examine EPLF diplomacy within the regional context of the Horn and its history of conflict and shifting alliances. Of particular importance

are the other states and movements that rejected Ethiopia's hegemonic aspirations, namely Somalia, Sudan and opposition movements within Ethiopia, especially the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Somalia was hostile to Ethiopia because of the Ogaden question and provided EPLF officials with diplomatic Somali passports, which in turn led the EPLF to develop supportive relations with Somali opposition groups within Ethiopia. Sudan, angered by Ethiopian support for the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in southern Sudan, permitted the EPLF access through its border region and the establishment of a major supply system to northern Eritrea via Port Sudan, as well as the establishment of the EPLF's major foreign office in Khartoum. In addition, more than 500,000 Eritrean refugees are thought to have fled to Sudan, many of whom have yet to return.

Finally, within Ethiopia, the EPLF formed a strategic alliance with the TPLF (Young 1996). It was thus no coincidence that in 1991 TPLF fighters marched into Addis Ababa and took control of the central Ethiopian government at about the same time as EPLF fighters marched into Asmara. With the agreement of the new Ethiopian government to support Eritrean independence if ratified in an internationally supervised referendum (which delayed *de jure* independence for two years until 1993), Ethiopia's hegemonic ambitions were believed to be a thing of the past; something that would prove a fateful mistake in the future to come.

Eritrean Foreign Policy Objectives: Regional and Global Contexts

At the time the EPLF came to power and Eritrea emerged as an independent state, the international landscape of a post-Cold War order dominated by a "newly triumphant West" left the new Eritrean government with strong incentives to pursue close links with the U.S. (Clapham 1997, 103; Fengler 2001). Eritrea thus became, together with Uganda and Ethiopia, an important part of U.S. strategy to isolate the Islamist government in Sudan. All three countries in return received positive recognition from the West and were typically referred to as models for African development. Policymakers and academics alike were prone to speak of a "new bloc" of African leaders who had succeeded in restoring stability to their war-ravaged countries, symbolizing a new style of politics in post-Cold War Africa (e.g., see Ottaway 1999).

Eritrea's position as a diasporic state and the importance it attached to territorial integrity nonetheless made securing the nation's borders and maintaining independence and internal political order against foreign and domestic threats the guiding principles of foreign policy. Against this backdrop, Eritrea became involved in armed conflicts with all of its neighbors in the Horn and with Yemen across the Red Sea straits. In each of these conflicts, Eritrea attempted to set the agenda while at the same time succumbing to international arbitration and con-

flict resolution mechanisms. This suggests a continuation of the pattern of foreign involvement that existed during the Cold War, in which the countries of the Horn were influenced by and to some degree dependent on the two superpowers, while at the same time retaining a remarkable degree of autonomy in pursuing their own objectives (Ottaway 1982). Conflicts that erupted between Eritrea and three countries within the region—Sudan, Yemen and Ethiopia—provide insights into the evolution of Eritrean foreign policy.

Conflict between Eritrea and Sudan never led to an all-out war. It remained a low-intensity conflict characterized by occasional armed incursions carried out by a Sudanese-sponsored Islamic movement and measures on the diplomatic front. Eritrean relations with Sudan could have been expected to develop amicably. After all, the Sudanese government was the most important regional ally of the EPLF, serving as a staging base and conduit for arms and aid, and providing refuge for hundreds of thousands of Eritrean refugees. But political tensions between Asmara and Khartoum developed as early as 1992, even before Eritrea was officially independent. In the border area with Sudan, an armed insurgency, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM), tried to infiltrate Eritrean territory but was repelled by EPLF forces. From the outset, the Eritrean side was suspicious of Sudanese support for the EIJM, a charge Khartoum denied. After Eritrean independence, the celebrations of which were attended by Sudanese President Bashir, tensions between Eritrea and Sudan intensified. In response to a renewed battle between members of the EIJM and Eritrean government forces in 1993, Eritrea lodged an official protest against Sudan with the UN Security Council (Lefebvre 1995). In December 1994, Eritrea finally broke off diplomatic relations with Sudan and in the following year a conference of Sudanese opposition groups was hosted in Asmara. In due course the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Sudanese anti-Islamist opposition made up of nine organizations, the most important of which was the SPLA, established its official headquarters in Asmara, on the premises of the by then defunct Sudanese embassy. At the same time, Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki announced his preparedness to support Sudanese opposition groups that were intent on overthrowing the government in Khartoum.

These were harsh moves from the Eritrean side, especially considering that the EIJM never posed a real threat to the Eritrean state. In 1995, it was estimated to have around 400 members, with some 300 more undergoing training in eastern Sudan (Lefebvre 1995, 38). It had almost no following, even among Eritreans critical of the EPLF government, and its activities were limited to the Eritrean-Sudanese border areas and comprised mainly isolated attacks and the laying of land mines. But what was of major concern to Eritrea—and this has to be understood within the Eritrean foreign policy priorities of securing its borders and its political order against foreign and domestic threats—was the Islamist political message being spread by the EIJM's activities in this new nation of approximately three million people, half of whom are Muslim, and among the considerable Eritrean refugee population in Sudan.

At the same time, Eritrea judged it opportune and in its long-term interest to actively demonstrate support for the anti-Islamist agenda of the U.S. and its allies in the region. In 1993 the U.S. placed Sudan on its list of terrorist states, and in 1997 various sanctions were introduced. While otherwise keeping largely in the background, Washington was shoring up the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea as bulwarks against Islamism in the Horn, which proved to be financially beneficial to both states.³ Another state with a considerable interest in the Horn and fear of increased Islamism is Israel. Since the mid-1960s, the Horn featured prominently in Israeli strategic planning. Israel became obsessed with the fear that the Red Sea might become an "Arab lake," eventually threatening Israeli access to the Indian Ocean (Lefebvre 1995, 44). At the time, Israel strongly opposed the Eritrean struggle for independence and provided military aid to the Ethiopian regime. When Israel realized in 1991 that Eritrean independence was a foregone conclusion, it quickly adjusted its policies. Close ties developed, particularly in the exchange of intelligence and the transfer of arms and military expertise. Eritrea—with its own fear of Islamic fundamentalism—believed Israel to be a natural Red Sea ally and a possible model for economic development.

From 1994 onwards, Eritrean-Sudanese relations remained strained: the NDA continued to occupy the former Sudanese embassy in Asmara as its offices, and SPLA leader John Garang and other prominent Sudanese opposition figures could frequently be seen in Asmara. At the same time, occasional incursions by the EIJM into Eritrea continued sporadically, whereas Eritrean army personnel helped to train Sudanese opposition forces. On more than one occasion there was strong suspicion that Eritrean troops had a direct hand in military gains made by the opposition within Sudan, especially during the spring of 1997, when the central government in Khartoum lost control of most of its eastern border areas (Péninou 1997). Only when war broke out in 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia did the picture change, as, following the ancient rules of conflict and shifting alliances in the Horn, both warring parties felt the need to court Sudan. A reconciliation agreement was therefore signed in 1991 between the Eritrean president and his Sudanese counterpart. This was followed by a surprise visit by Bashir to Asmara in 2000, which was the beginning of the end of the frosty relations between the two countries. A short time later, diplomatic links resumed. The Eritrean embassy in Khartoum re-opened, followed by the Sudanese embassy in Asmara (which had been handed back to representatives of the Sudanese government some months earlier) and the border crossing near Kasala.⁴ Sudanese opposition groups remained in Eritrea, but were asked to keep a low profile and relocated to the port of Massawa. Eritrea from then onwards encouraged a negotiated solution between the southern Sudanese forces and the government.⁵

A second conflict in which Eritrea became embroiled involved a dispute with Yemen over control of the Hanish Islands, an archipelago of approximately 40

mostly uninhabited islands, islets and rocks at the southern end of the Red Sea, nearly 65 miles north of the Bab al-Mandab strait. This was a classic conflict for a diasporic state in that it was about boundaries. At the same time, it was a conflict about control over maritime (and thus economic) resources in the widest sense, including fishing rights, the possible exploitation of offshore oil and gas, and the development of tourism (Lefebvre 1998; Stansfield 2001).

The roots of the Hanish Islands dispute can be traced back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. While under Ottoman rule, the islands were administered from Massawa and recognized as Turkish possessions, but their status was never clearly defined afterwards. In 1938, Britain and Italy signed a treaty, which gave both countries the right to protect fishermen on different parts of the archipelago, made Britain responsible for the maintenance of all lighthouses, and prohibited either party from establishing sovereignty or erecting defenses. In 1962, a new international agreement was signed confirming Britain's role as "managing government" (Stansfield 2001) and lighthouse keeper. This treaty was signed by France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States. Neither Ethiopia, of which Eritrea was then a part, nor North Yemen signed the treaty (Lefebvre 1998, 370). In 1989, the main government role was assumed by Yemen. It is important to bear in mind that none of these agreements assigned sovereignty over the islands to any of the parties involved, and Eritrea did not exist as an independent state when they were signed. Thus, no nation has legally been in full possession of the islands since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and no island has been inhabited on a permanent basis, although many of the islands have a long history of being visited by fisherman from what are now Yemen and Eritrea (Johnson 2000).

The conflict between Yemen and Eritrea over the islands officially started on December 15, 1995, when Eritrean naval forces attacked a garrison of Yemeni troops on Hanish al-Kabir (Greater Hanish) and occupied the island two days later. The immediate cause for this Eritrean action was a move by Yemen to develop Greater Hanish as a tourist resort. In mid-1995, the construction of a hotel and scuba diving complex had started, during which Yemeni soldiers were sent to the island to protect the site. To prevent a *fait accompli* in the form of Yemen completing the construction of the resort and using its existence to further Yemeni claims to the island, Eritrea delivered an ultimatum to Yemen to withdraw its civilian and military personnel from the island in November 1995. This ultimatum was ignored by Yemen.

Apart from this concrete Eritrean grievance, the conflict has to be viewed within a broader framework. In 1982 the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea was signed and came into force in November 1994. Among other issues, it provides for the creation of a 12-mile territorial sea boundary and a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone from a state's coastal baseline, within which states are granted sovereign rights to explore natural and maritime resources (Lefebvre 1998, 371). In the case of the Hanish Islands, these include rich fishing grounds as well as prospective offshore oil and natural gas reserves. Even though no commercially exploitable quantities of the latter had been discovered at the time,

both countries had staked out exploration blocks in the Red Sea which at certain points overlapped, including in the territorial waters of the Hanish Islands.

Other motives behind the geopolitical ambitions of the war have been cited, including the claim that Saudi Arabia wanted to weaken Yemen to gain the upper hand in its own border dispute with the country, or that Israel was the driving force behind Eritrean actions to secure the islands (Stansfield 2001). Convincing evidence does not exist for either claim, or for the tendency to interpret the conflict in terms of Arab-African rivalry. While in the immediate aftermath of the Eritrean occupation of Greater Hanish the Arab League endorsed Yemen's claim to the island and spoke of Eritrean military aggression (Lefebvre 1998, 376), this dimension soon faded, as Arab states had diverse agendas in relation to the conflict.

This interpretation also points to the eventual solution: after Eritrea had gained control of Greater Hanish, it readily agreed to international arbitration to settle the dispute once and for all; to focus on its own development, and to pursue a positive relationship with Yemen. In October 1996, an agreement was signed in Paris between Asmara and San'a for the two parties to submit their dispute to an international tribunal, which was to render judgment on the issue of sovereignty over the islands and the delimitation of the maritime boundaries between the two countries, taking into consideration the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other pertinent factors (see *Eritrea-Yemen Arbitration Agreement 1996*).

The Eritrea-Yemen Arbitration Tribunal completed its work in December 1999 (Kwiatkowska 2001; Reisman 1999; Reisman 2000). It ruled that neither of the two parties possessed a historic title to any of the Hanish Islands, and that it was inappropriate to determine the sovereignty of the islands as a whole. The islands needed to be considered separately in relation to each sub-group, as the legal history of the islands indicated different histories for different islands (Johnson 2000). Yemen was awarded the main group of islands (the Zuqar-Hanish group, inclusive of Greater Hanish and the northern islands). Eritrea was awarded two smaller sub-groups of the Mohabbakahs and the Haycocks (*Eritrea-Yemen Arbitration Award 1998*). The tribunal recognized the traditional fishing rights of Eritrean fishermen, including a requirement that Yemen ensure the continuation of these rights in addition to free access for both Eritrean and Yemeni fishermen to all islands. From the standpoint of the development of international law, the human-rights perspective used by the tribunal was regarded as innovative, especially in underpinning the rights of indigenous peoples, in this case the traditional fishermen, following a rationale that "in order to respond to human needs and aspirations, and to accommodate traditional social frameworks, it may become necessary to depart from the State-oriented international (and national) law" (Antunes 2001, 316).

Both parties accepted the ruling. This arbitration has since been hailed as a landmark in finding lasting solutions for disputes between states and re-

establishing a peaceful relationship which contributes to international peace and security in a particularly sensitive region of the world (Antunes 2001; Johnson 2000). Especially the fact that Eritrea—which had militarily gained the upper hand but most of whose claims were refuted by the tribunal—accepted the verdict was judged as an encouraging sign for future conflict resolution mechanisms. Since then, the Eritrean-Yemeni relationship has been characterized by constructive engagement (although the aftermath of 9/11 might lead to regional re-alignments). The readiness of the Eritrean side to support and accept the arbitration process and the delimitation of its maritime boundary points again to the fact that Eritrean foreign policy, in relation to its direct neighbors, is focused on issues of territorial integrity.

A third conflict involved direct warfare between Eritrea and Ethiopia. When the EPLF marched into Asmara in 1991 and its allies from the TPLF took power in Addis Ababa, the leaders of these movements, Isaias and Meles Zenawi, seemed certain that Ethiopia's hegemonic past was buried. Eritrea's accession to independence did indeed progress smoothly.⁶ The period prior to 1997 was (at least on the surface) characterized by good neighborly relations. The image of a solid alliance was carefully nurtured even though the two nations opted for different political and economic systems. In the political realm, Eritrea opted for the construction of a strong central unitary state, while Ethiopia opted for a federal democratic republic. In the economic realm, the role model for Eritrea was Singapore with its export-oriented economy and a liberal trade regime, whereas for Ethiopia it became South Korea, focused on extensive investments, production for the internal market and trade controls (Negash and Tronvoll 2000; Péninou 1998). In 1997, however, clouds appeared on the horizon, with the introduction by Eritrea of its own currency, the Nakfa (Eritrea had previously continued to use the Ethiopian Birr), and Ethiopia's insistence on a change in the trade regime between the two countries. Some scholars have argued that a "hidden agenda" behind the outbreak of the war—which they could not envisage as being about a piece of marginal land along the common border—was related to these economic issues (Abbink 1998).

It may well be true that Eritrea was partly affronted by protectionist Ethiopian economic policies, and that Tigray and Eritrea were in direct competition to supply the wider Ethiopian market, but this does not seem a convincing explanation for an all-out war in which both sides would suffer severe economic setbacks (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). Something more fundamental was at stake, and the war for Eritrea soon became an attack on its very existence as a nation. The first outbreak of hostilities in the Badme/Yirga Triangle in May 1998 appeared to be a localized clash in one of the border areas between Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. When Eritrea gained independence, both countries regarded the Italian colonial border as the legitimate boundary. However, this border was never clearly demarcated and boundary-related problems had begun to surface in the early 1990s. In fact, during the Eritrean war of liberation, there were arguments between the different liberation fronts about where exactly the future border would be, including in the Badme area (Young 1996). Numerous meet-

ings were held to resolve these issues. The problem remained that territory inside Eritrea, according to colonial maps, was administered by Ethiopian authorities. The incident on May 6, 1998 was thus not so special: a small group of Eritrean soldiers entered one of the disputed areas around Badme, and a shoot-out ensued with the local militia, which caused a few casualties on both sides. The Eritrean reaction was to send large contingents of soldiers into the area to reclaim what was regarded as Eritrean territory controlled by Ethiopia (Negash and Tronvoll 2000).⁷ The reaction of the Ethiopian government, after initial surprise at the sudden upsurge in military activity, was equally firm: it declared that Eritrea had launched a war of aggression, and made the recovery of its territory a major objective (Clapham 2000; Gilkes and Plaut 1999).

Whereas one might rightly claim that the war, which in its course claimed tens of thousands of lives (the official Eritrean casualty figure alone speaks of 19,000 dead), was not fought over the particular stretches of land at Badme and the other contested areas, but was fought for a boundary that symbolizes the essence of what defines Eritrean nationhood. As Clapham (2000, 13) notes, a sense of territoriality is deeply entrenched in both states but, as has been pointed out, much more so in Eritrea, which fought such a long and bitter war for its territorial independence.

A soldier in an interview with the author at the frontline of Tsorona put it this way in 1999: "The land of Eritrea, that is what we are, this earth, these trees ... if you take our land away, we cease to exist, so that is why we are here, that is what I am fighting for, that is what our martyrs died for." For many Eritreans, the national symbol of their nationhood is the outline of the map, rather than the flag or the official national symbol, the camel. Every year, on May 24, the anniversary of Eritrean independence, shops all over the country, but especially in the capital, Asmara, have congratulatory messages written on their windows, accompanied by a drawing of the Eritrean map, of which the straight line of the Badme triangle is a prominent feature.

With hindsight, it does not come as such a surprise that the war flared up in the Badme area, which remains highly contentious to this day. After Ethiopia militarily gained the upper hand and occupied large chunks of Eritrean territory in the western lowlands of the country, the war ended when both parties signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, brokered by the OAU in June 2000 in Algiers. This agreement paved the way for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force along the border and the establishment of a buffer zone between the warring parties 25 kilometers inside Eritrean territory. In due course, a border commission was appointed to determine the exact boundary based on colonial treaties and applicable international law. In its ruling in April 2002, the commission carefully avoided any concrete reference to the village of Badme and its coordinates, allowing both sides to claim Badme (Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission 2002).

The announcement of the verdict—which both parties had agreed would be final and binding, and have since welcomed in principle—was followed by a propaganda war, in which both sides claimed victory in having been awarded this highly symbolic town (see for example BBC 2002; AFP 2002; IRIN 2002). Only the actual demarcation on the ground (which the UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea hoped would be completed during 2004) could bring clarity as to which side of the border Badme will be located. The absence of such a demarcation, however, heightened the possibility of further violent confrontations, which occurred in later years. In essence, this war was (and still is) about borders and issues of national identity and, ultimately, the politics of state survival, and as such seems strangely old-fashioned in today's globalized world.

Approaching this conflict from the wider perspective of diasporic states, it should not come as a surprise that Eritrea and Ethiopia went to war, especially if one focuses on the precarious position of Eritrea as a newly independent country whose closest links were with its former hegemonic neighbor. It has been said that the "political dynamics of hegemonic states ought to make them good allies of other but non-competing hegemonic states, but dangerous partners to their more proximate neighbors" (Lyob 2000, 661). The Eritrean-Ethiopian war proves the validity of this statement in demonstrating that the danger for Eritrea remained real and in fact had only been lying dormant underneath a thin cover of cooperation that had never really taken root. This cooperation broke down as soon as an opportunity arose. Eritrea, throughout the course of this new war, lived through the real or imagined threat of being overrun by an enemy army with an apparently infinite supply of soldiers.⁸ At some point in the military campaign, the Ethiopian command openly spoke about marching onto Asmara and changing the Eritrean leadership. While the Ethiopian government claimed throughout that it had no intention to reconquer Eritrea, its forces nevertheless attempted on various occasions to advance to the *kebesa*, the Eritrean highlands.

That both parties succumbed eventually—albeit only after two years of failed attempts—to international mediation efforts has to be understood in terms of their respective political agendas. Eritrea's rationale for going to war was from the beginning to secure its borders. With Ethiopian troops occupying large parts of Eritrean territory in the fertile lowland area, the best hope to realize this objective was in an agreement based on international law and guaranteed by international bodies like the UN. Ethiopia's war aims shifted during the conflict from averting what was officially defined as an Eritrean aggression and securing its territory to installing a pro-Ethiopian government in Asmara and conquering the Eritrean port of Assab, even though the last two objectives were never stated publicly as such (Péninou 2000). Eritrea was successful in repulsing several Ethiopian assaults on Assab, which was partly the reason for its defeat on other fronts. At various points in time, almost the entire Eritrean army was involved in preventing an Ethiopian breakthrough. With Ethiopia's failure to advance into the Eritrean highlands, its strategic position would have become precarious during the rainy season which was about to start. By agreeing to a framework to end the hostilities at this time, Ethiopia was able to secure conditions in its fa-

vor, such as the establishment of the 25 kilometer buffer zone largely within Eritrean territory.

The most important outcome of the war will be the legal and physical demarcation of the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the importance of which goes beyond the reallocation of contested territory to either side. In addition, Ethiopia will be defined as a landlocked nation, and herewith the status of the Eritrean port of Assab (which was Ethiopia's main outlet to the Red Sea before the war) is settled as being unequivocally Eritrean.⁹ As such, the border demarcation creates the conditions for both countries to concentrate, once again, on the challenges of development, and it might have taken this violent conflict to arrive at this historic juncture. One should not forget how many wars it took European nations to settle their boundaries. Some scholars even argue that the Eritrean-Ethiopian war was necessary for both countries to assert their separate national identities (Triulzi 2002). The war could have been avoided, however, if both countries had taken disputes over their border in the preceding years more seriously. Instead of relying on informal channels of communication and understanding, both sides should have pursued a formal treaty based on international law (Iyob 2000). The most widely cited of these informal channels is an exchange of letters between Isaias and Meles in 1997 when, on a variety of occasions, problems occurred in the border area (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). In a more general sense, this points to the fact that the bureaucratic infrastructure which usually supports interstate relations had never been properly established. Both leaders instead relied on highly personalized forms of diplomacy when issues arose (Gilkes and Plaut 1999).

A second outcome of the war is that, for the first time, Eritrea suffered a serious military defeat, destroying the myth of the superiority of its army. This myth developed in the course of its war of liberation, when the EPLF defeated a powerful Ethiopian army that was supported by the former Eastern and Western powers alike). This defeat might, in the long term, change Eritrea's readiness to seek military solutions, and thus contribute to efforts for non-violent conflict resolution in the region (Abbink 1998). In order for a truly stable peace to emerge in the Horn of Africa, however, the pattern of "mutual interference" (Cliffe 1999) in each other's internal affairs, which has been prevalent in the region for the past thirty years, needs to be broken. This occurred for a brief period in the early 1990s, when the new leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia pushed an agenda for peace and development within the region and pledged to refrain from supporting internal opposition in neighboring countries. These pledges were nonetheless abandoned in late 1993 when Eritrea—together with Ethiopia and Uganda—started to support the southern Sudanese opposition, in response to alleged attempts by the Sudanese government to support the EIJM (Gilkes and Plaut 1999).

A final outcome of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war and probably its most bitter legacy is a changed notion of citizenship. Whereas Eritrea, typical for a dias-

poric country, extended citizenship rights to all individuals who have an Eritrean father or mother, no matter where they lived, this meant in practice that many Eritrean citizens living in Ethiopia had dual citizenship. They were thus eligible to vote in the Eritrean referendum for independence as well as Ethiopian elections. Before the outbreak of the war, this was not seen as a major problem. The war changed all that: Eritreans in Ethiopia became *persona non grata* and tens of thousands were deported or put in detention, often in violation of their human rights (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). This not surprisingly led to enduring hard feelings among the victims of these deportations. It remains to be seen what long-term implications these issues will have for the future of the Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship.

Eritrea within the International Political Economy

When Eritrea entered the world stage as an independent nation in 1993, an increasingly strengthened global liberal order called upon developing countries to follow a program of combining democratic governance with a liberal, free-market economy. The EPLF-led government "struggled" to meet the expectations of this new order (Frankland and Noble 1996, 420). At the same time, the concepts of self-reliance and intense commitment to autonomy which characterized the EPLF's policies during the time of the liberation struggle became embedded in the new state, affecting Eritrea's foreign relations with a variety of international actors, such as governments, NGOs and multilateral organizations. One practice initiated by the new Eritrean government was to refuse international aid that was perceived as having too many strings attached. A consequence of this "continued self-reliance" (Frankland and Noble 1996, 417) was the expulsion of most NGOs from Eritrea at the end of 1997 that would not agree to the government's criteria of project ownership and other conditions (Müller 1998). A rejection of foreign-imposed conditionalities was also why Eritrea initially refused to undertake projects financed by the IMF (Fengler 2001). It is important to note, however, that the Eritrean definition of self-reliance did not embody the vision of a self-sufficient economy removed from the dynamics of the international system (as was the case of Tanzania under Julius Nyerere or in present-day North Korea). In contrast, self-reliance in the Eritrean context focuses on using the country's resources and developing its human capital so that Eritrea can become integrated successfully into the global economy, without entrusting too much decision-making power to international financial institutions or other global actors.¹⁰

The long-term vision of the Eritrean government is "the creation of a modern, technologically advanced and internationally competitive economy within the next two decades" (Government of Eritrea 1994, 10). The role model is Singapore, characterized by financial liberalism, an export-oriented economy, and distrust of unregulated foreign aid. In a broader perspective, one can speak of a

"second wave of Modernization" (Fengler 2001, 212), the first having been Italian colonialism, which brought a short phase of economic boom with an equally outward-oriented economic strategy (albeit serving Italian war efforts against Ethiopia and beyond).

The Eritrean government has attempted to create a domestic economic environment conducive to attracting foreign investment that in turn is adaptable to the dynamics of globalization so as to promote the nation's advancement and development. The government has adopted one of the most liberal foreign investment codes on the African continent. Massawa enjoys the status of a free port and, like Dubai, is intended to serve as a regional airport hub. Prior to the war with Ethiopia, however, foreign investment was increasing very slowly and for the most part remained confined to the Eritrean diaspora. The outbreak of war not surprisingly brought many if not most projects to a halt altogether.

Although the Eritrean vision of economic integration into the global economy may sound over-ambitious and unrealistic for a country emerging from three decades of war, the country was relatively successful in achieving these goals from 1993 to 1998. During this period, the economy witnessed an annual 6 percent growth rate with a relatively low rate of inflation (on average less than 8 percent annually) (Fengler 2001, 190). Eritrea also won high approval ratings from foreign governments, the donor community and international financial institutions for its overall commitment to fostering a business environment free of corruption. The World Bank, for example, characterizes projects in Eritrea as among its most successful in Africa, citing Eritrea as among the best 20 percent of all countries in which the bank is active (Fengler 2001). Despite rejecting the conditionalities of international financial institutions, the Eritrean government has undertaken macro-economic policies that closely correspond to IMF prescriptions, a phenomenon that has been referred to as "adjustment without lending" (Fengler 2001, 198).

Trade is an important case in point. Until the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, Ethiopia remained the most important market for Eritrean exports, followed by the other regional powerhouse, Sudan. At the same time, trade relations were slowly developing with Europe, most notably Italy, which, together with Saudi Arabia (eventually replaced by the United Arab Emirates), served as the largest providers of Eritrean imports. In the post-1998 period, Japan has also emerged as an important actor. The main Eritrean exports include raw materials and metals, a variety of basic manufactured goods, and live animals. Eritrea's main imports include fuel, machinery, foodstuffs, manufactured goods and, since 1998, military equipment, for which official statistics are unavailable.

The political-economy of Eritrean foreign policy can be described as a combination of the government's commitment to the often contradictory goals of promoting a liberal, free-market economy and the socialist ideal of social justice. The latter goal is particularly demonstrated by the role the former EPLF, transformed into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), plays

within the economy. Specifically, although the Eritrean government at the time of independence was committed to a policy of privatization, a crucial element of this policy was for the PFDJ to assume control over approximately one third of all privatized assets. Profits from these businesses were intended to benefit the families of those who died in the struggle for Eritrean independence. The Eritrean government regards social justice as being as important as economic growth for Eritrea's long-term survival. And to a large extent, the international donor community goes along with Eritrean ideas. This was most visible at a meeting of Eritrean leaders with international donors in Asmara in 1998. The Eritrean government not only had drafted on its own (i.e., without donor input) a comprehensive planning strategy, entitled National Economic Policy Framework Document for 1998–2000, it also insisted on presenting it to the donor community, a novelty in African development cooperation where the norm is that such blueprints are typically drawn up at the donors' headquarters (Fengler 2001).

The Eritrean case demonstrates that there is room for African states to determine part of their policy agendas even in today's globalized context. It is too early to predict the long-term outcome of the Eritrean effort to maintain economic autonomy and decision-making power while at the same time following a strategy of integration into the global economy. Developments during the first years of independence were promising until interrupted by a new war with Ethiopia. This war most notably forced Eritrea to lower its conditions for accepting involvement by the international donor community. Only time will tell if the net result of this conflict will be to tilt the scales against Eritrean autonomy and in favor of more externally imposed conditionalities.

In a wider sense, Eritrea's future integration into the global economy will depend not so much on issues of free markets and economic orthodoxy, but on the legacy of conflict in the Horn of Africa, from which Eritrea has not managed to escape. It will be Eritrea's relationships with its regional neighbors that will determine its scope for wider political action.

Eritrean Foreign Policy Objectives in the Post-9/11 Era

The Horn of Africa has recently enjoyed a renewed strategic importance within the international system as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent U.S.-led war on terrorism. Some have predicted that the regional "winners" in this war are Sudan, an oil-producing country and seat of an American anti-terrorist bureau in Khartoum, and Ethiopia, which has remained a regional favorite for U.S. policymakers (Péninou 2001). It has also been suggested that Eritrea, not least of all due to its long coastline, is of strategic importance, as witnessed by visits from senior U.S. military personnel, such as General Tommy Franks, former commander of the U.S. military's Central Command, to discuss the possible creation of a U.S. naval base (Belida 2002).

Eritrea was quick to realize how the post-9/11 world order could work in its favor. President Isaias noted that Eritrea has always had to live with the threat of

terrorist networks, specifically citing a link between the terrorist activities of the EIJM and Islamists in Afghanistan (Plaut 1995). He also was reportedly ready to pursue closer military ties with the U.S., including granting permission for the creation of a U.S. naval base on Eritrean soil. Although no such U.S. base has been created, the U.S. military reportedly renovated docks and storage facilities at the port of Assab prior to the 2003 U.S. war against Iraq, and rumors are rampant that the U.S. military is present on some islands of the Dahlak archipelago. Needless to say, a U.S. presence there would give it control of the full length of the Red Sea and the eastern approaches to the Suez Canal and the Sinai Peninsula.

Eritrea's attempts to play the "9/11 card" have not yielded the results expected by Eritrean policymakers. U.S. authorities obviously have to weigh Eritrea's strategic usefulness in a region where other facilities are available (e.g., the creation of a U.S. military base in Djibouti) against the potential drawbacks of pursuing closer ties with an increasingly authoritarian regime. The once admired Eritrean government has come under sharp criticism for human rights abuses in the aftermath of the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia (Amnesty International 2002; England 2002). Eritrea nonetheless remains determined to become a major U.S. ally in the Horn of Africa. Toward this end, it hired the lobbying team of a prestigious American law firm to make its case in Washington, with a particular focus on securing a U.S. military base on Eritrean soil (Sarason 2002). From the perspective of Eritrean policymakers, a U.S. presence in Assab not only would bolster Eritrea's global stature, it would guarantee the security of Eritrea's second port from possible future Ethiopian military action and thereby ensure an end to Ethiopia's demand for privileged access to the Eritrean Red Sea coast. Allowing the U.S. military to use the port facilities would also provide the Eritrean government with handsome economic revenues.

An important concern for Eritrea in the post-9/11 environment is that Ethiopia and Sudan, together with Yemen, have formed their own regional grouping to combat terrorism in the Horn of Africa. While proclaiming a willingness to cooperate with U.S. military activities, this new alliance—defined by its protagonists as the "nucleus of an Arab-African body that is aimed at achieving co-operation for development" (AFP 13 January 2003)—has been interpreted in Asmara as a move to isolate Eritrea, which has "stormy relations with all three states." Eritrean-Sudanese relations reached an all-time low in October 2002, when Sudanese authorities closed the border with Eritrea and accused the Eritrean government of backing a renewed SPLA offensive (AFP 5 October 2002). Similarly, relations between Eritrea and Yemen have recently shown new strains, albeit mainly in the form of heated verbal exchanges. Relations with Ethiopia remain tense, at best. Toward this end, it is highly unlikely that Eritrea will be able to escape the cycle of violence in the Horn of Africa by adjusting its foreign policy objectives to support U.S. strategic interests. As a result, the real-

ity of being left isolated and vulnerable within the regional power distribution of the Horn of Africa remains a real and potent threat for Eritrean policymakers.

Conclusion

Eritrean foreign policy since independence is best described as being dominated by what the theoretical literature refers to as the classic "big man" (Wright 1999), in which foreign policy remains heavily dominated by the Office of the President. The lack of democratization in Eritrea has ensured a limited role for those actors—Parliament, interest groups, and civil society in general—typically associated with foreign policy decision-making in democratic polities. As a result, decision-making depends on the personal whims and wishes of a charismatic president, who is generally admired by his own people but is equally an "authoritarian and sometimes a solitary figure" (Péninou 1998). Eritrea fits Jackson and Rosberg's (1982) characterization of "prophetic rule," in which a revolutionary and visionary leadership ultimately seeks to reshape domestic society and foreign policy in ways consistent with a broader vision for a better future.

President Isaias clearly serves as the core of executive power in Eritrea. He not only is president, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, chairman of the National Assembly, and secretary general of the PFDJ, but also commands wide-ranging powers of appointment (including ministers, provincial governors, high court judges and ambassadors). The president's office, including the Office for Macropolicy attached to it, serves as the ultimate decision-making body, typically sidelining relevant ministries (Hirt 2001, 147; Pool 2001, 171f). The realm of Eritrean foreign policy—including relations with other heads of states and donor agencies, trade relations and issues of national security—is clearly dominated by the president and a small inner cycle of special advisors.

An important objective of this decision-making core upon independence was to establish a viable state within the global economic system and enter into harmonious alliances with other members of the family of nations (Westing 1999). However, the primary concern underlying all other policies, including foreign policy, was and remains the quest to secure the unity of the nation and the integrity of its territory. Although it is perhaps too strong a statement to claim that "the only real ideology of the Eritrean regime is an undeviating nationalism" (Péninou 1998), it is certainly true that this is a major force by which foreign policy is guided, often to the detriment of many foreign policy objectives.

In terms of creating a viable state within the global economic system, Eritrea was reasonably successful until the 1998-2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian war. By pursuing a strategy of self-reliance, Eritrea has demonstrated that, instead of succumbing to external conditionalities, even a small impoverished African state can influence the agenda of donors and the Bretton Woods institutions. Whether the Eritrean vision to follow in the footsteps of countries like Singapore has a chance to succeed in the long-term is another question. It is too early to tell in a

country which, for the time being, remains dependent on food aid (but that should not let us forget that many of the Asian Tigers found themselves in similar conditions not so long ago).

In a wider sense, whether Eritrea becomes a viable state will depend largely on whether it can enter into harmonious alliances with other members of the family of nations, particularly its neighbors in the Horn and especially Ethiopia. In realizing the importance of a secure regional environment, Eritrea was a driving force in revitalizing the former Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) in the 1990s to make its successor—the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—an active player in the pursuit of conflict resolution in the Horn of Africa (Cliffe 1999). These efforts nonetheless have succumbed to the old pattern of mutual interference that prevails within the Horn of Africa, as demonstrated by the Eritrean-Ethiopian war and shifting alliances associated with the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

In order to be truly effective, Eritrean foreign policy must be representative of the diverse interests that comprise Eritrean society. The unitary state developed by Eritrea may have served the country well in the first years of a difficult nation-building process, but it has outgrown its usefulness, and unfortunately has turned on the people it originally sought to lead. After the "hot" phase of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war came to an end in 2000, for example, many people asked questions about its conduct, typically doing so clandestinely. However, when a lively private press emerged and dared to vent publicly the frustrations of ordinary citizens, the presses were shut down and journalists and other high-profile government critics were imprisoned, all in the name of national unity. As Jackson and Rosberg (1982) have noted, successful prophetic leaders have been rare in history. Over time, the central concern of inspiring their peoples often turns into an attempt to hold onto power at any cost. A future Eritrea, which can accommodate its own internal divisions and differences in a democratic way, will be the prerequisite to do so equally as concerns its foreign policy on the world stage.

Notes

¹ In 1889, Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia and King Umberto I of Italy defined the borders of the new Italian colony in the treaty of Wichale. In due course, a number of treaties were signed to demarcate this boundary, but for most of its perimeter the boundary was never actually demarcated on the ground (see Trivelli 1998).

² The oft-cited statement on this issue made in 1952 by John Foster Dulles, then U.S. Secretary of State, sums up the dilemma Eritreans would face for the next decades: "From the point of view of justice, the opinion of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and consideration of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia" (quoted from Permanent People's Tribunal, 1982). In a

spectacular reversal of past U.S. policy, then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, testified before the American Congress in 1990 that the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 was illegal and the Eritrean struggle legitimate (see Frankland and Noble 1996, 416).

¹ How much influence Washington exercised over Eritrean actions is hard to say. The author happened to be in the Eritrean town of Tessenci, near the Sudanese border and on the main road toward Kassala, shortly before the border closing was announced. At the time, a group of U.S. soldiers and Central Intelligence Agency personnel, officially referred to as 'health workers', were in the area and involved in various clandestine activities, inquiries into which were strictly deterred by the Eritrean side. In the course of the 1998-2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian border war, maps used by the UN mission to the area were partly based on data collected by the CIA.

² The conflict between Eritrea and Sudan is a classic conflict between governments, not people. The author was on the Eritrean side when the border between Eritrea and Sudan near Kassala was closed. People she spoke to shrugged their shoulders, saying "This is about politics, not our problem." In fact, for the local inhabitants it was always possible to cross into each other's country, and people did not feel animosity toward each other. Similarly, the author was in Asmara during the time of President Bashir's visit, which was not announced beforehand and came to everybody as a surprise. But when his motorcade drove down Asmara's main street and people realized who he was, they broke into spontaneous cheers.

³ Under sustained pressure of foreign parties (in particular the U.S., Britain and Norway, as well as Kenya and Egypt) the SPLA (which relies on Western diplomatic, financial and media support) signed a peace accord with the Sudanese government in Nairobi in July 2002.

⁴ The 1974 Ethiopian revolution had deposed Emperor Haile Selassie and brought the military leadership of the Derg under Mengistu Haile Mariam to power. Among the resistance movements that emerged in different parts of Ethiopia to overthrow his regime, the TPLF proved the most successful and to this day its members hold the majority of key positions within the Ethiopian government.

In fact, since the last days of the Derg regime, substantial encroachments of the Tigrayan administration into territories that according to colonial treaties were Eritrean had taken place (and were never reversed), but were at the time ignored by the EPLF so as not to jeopardize the promised endorsement of the new Ethiopian government of the referendum result for Eritrean independence (Trivelli 1998, 279).

⁵ The Eritrean population is estimated at about three million, compared to more than 60 million people in neighboring Ethiopia. This means virtually every Eritrean family has some members in the armed forces during such periods of national mobilization. In the course of the war, the Ethiopian army employed one of its traditional methods of fighting wars: recruiting a large number of farmers into its ranks and hoping to defeat the enemy by sheer force of numbers.

⁶ Ethiopian opposition groups demanded that Assab be included in the arbitration process in The Hague (even though Assab is clearly situated more than 40 km inside Eritrea) arguing that a nation as big as Ethiopia needed direct access to the sea. Under the leadership of the opposition Ethiopian Democratic Party, these groups strongly opposed the commission's verdict. The contestation of Assab was, however, never supported by the Ethiopian government, and Prime Minister Meles responded to opposition protests thus:

"We will not hand over our peace and democracy for the sake of Assab or any other issue" (Plaut 2002; Reuters 2002).

¹⁰ In some cases, self-reliance did, in the past, lead to the turning down of foreign assistance in favor of a "learning by doing" approach and so that Eritreans would identify with a particular project. This was the case, for example, with the rehabilitation of the main road between Massawa and Asmara, as well as with the rebuilding of an ancient Italian railway link between the two cities (Müller 1998).

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