



**HRSC: THE 1998
ERITREAN-ETHIOPIAN WAR**
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Introduction

The Eritrean - Ethiopian border war was a conflict held by said neighbouring countries, both situated in the Horn of Africa, that lasted from May of 1998 until June of 2000, although an official peace declaration was only signed by both parties in 2018. The war was triggered by Eritrea after breaking international law by invading Ethiopia due to disagreements on the exact border between the two nations. Due to this being the Historically Reformed Security Council, the debate shall take place just after the beginning of the conflict, in 1998.

Explanation of Key terms

EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front

The groups listed above were rebel groups involved in the uprising against the Derg government and the Eritrean War of Independence respectively. The EPRDF is a political coalition that was the main driving force behind the rebellion against the Derg government.

OAU: Organisation of African Unity - a coalition of African countries, similar to the EU.

UNMEE: United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea - the plan of action taken by the UN following the end of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.

Article 51 of the UN Charter: states that a nation may defend itself against armed attacks from opposing nations until the Security Council has decided on a course of action to take.

Arms Embargo: a restriction or a set of sanctions against a country that applies solely to weaponry.

Coup d'état: this refers to an illegal, unconstitutional seizure of political power from a nation's ruling government.

Military Junta: a military group that rules a country after taking power by force.

Background Information

Reasons for the conflict

Prior to World War 1, Eritrea was a colony of Italy, who made failed attempts to colonise Ethiopia. After World War 2, in which Italy's forces were severely weakened, the UN declared that the sovereign states of Ethiopia and Eritrea would be combined, with Eritrea being an autonomous state under the jurisdiction of Ethiopia's government. However, Emperor Haile Selassie, who ruled Ethiopia at the time, annexed Eritrea in 1962 against international UN law. The Eritrean population protested, with the separatist group of the EPLF rising up against the Ethiopian forces. In 1991, the Eritrean forces succeeded in reclaiming their country, and Eritrea officially joined the UN in 1993. Meanwhile, the jurisdiction of Ethiopia fell into the hands of the EPRDF in the same year, resulting in a brief period of peace and cooperation between the two nations. Unfortunately, this was not to last, as the division of Eritrea from Ethiopia resulted in several disputes regarding the exact location of the border between the two nations. In 1997, the UN commissioned a "border committee" to be formed, whose task it would be to determine the exact division of land and territory. The two countries initially considered reforming the borders present during Eritrea's period as a colony; this was rejected due to the countries being unable to agree on the exact interpretations, further enhancing hostilities.

The War

In 1998, seeing that relations with Ethiopia were becoming increasingly strained and that his power was weakening, President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea decided to annex the Ethiopian town of Badme. Badme had previously been a part of Eritrea and was positioned in one of the key areas being disputed. By reclaiming it, President Afewerki sought to increase Eritrea's influence and convince Ethiopia to relinquish more territory. Instead, it led to the Ethiopian military opening fire on the Eritrean forces holding the town. The Ethiopian government defended their actions by referencing Article 51 of the UN charter. This didn't stop the conflict from escalating, as both nations poured resources and troops into the warzone in an attempt to gain the upper hand. Weeks after the conflict began, Ethiopia bombed an airport located in Eritrea's capital city, Asmara. Eritrea responded by attacking the Ethiopian airport of Meleke. The two sides rapidly invested in their military, with their armies increasing to consist of more than 300,000 individuals. Multiple foreign parties attempted to resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner, with the UN, USA, Rwanda and OAU all presenting plans to The United Nations adopted Resolution 1177, which "condemned the use of force and welcomed statements from both sides to end the airstrikes." In addition, the representatives of the US and Rwanda attempted to persuade both contestants to withdraw to the borders present before the beginning of the conflict. Ethiopia was in favour of this plan, as it would once more give them ownership of Badme. Eritrea contested this, instead demanding that all disputed areas were demilitarised and monitored by a neutral party.

With this refusal, Ethiopia mobilised a large military force to recapture Badme. They succeeded in doing so, and advanced 10km into Eritrea. Seeing the imminent threat, Eritrea agreed to the OAU peace plan on February 27th, 1999. Ethiopia did not immediately withdraw from Eritrea, demanding that they remove all military forces from areas it had previously captured at the start of the war. Eritrea refused, and the fighting continued. Ethiopia launched another strike on the 12th of May, 2000, cutting off supplies to the Eritrean forces. With defeat imminent, the Eritrean government finally agreed to withdraw from all contested areas, as well as relinquishing several other areas at the request of the OAU. This marked the official end of the conflict. By this point, Ethiopia controlled approximately a quarter of Eritrea's former territory.

Major Players Involved

Supporters of Eritrea:

- The Commonwealth of Independent States
- Ukraine
- Romania
- Hungary
- Georgia
- Moldova

Supporters of Ethiopia:

- Russia
- China
- Belarus
- France
- Bulgaria

Russian Federation: before the EPRDF took power, Ethiopia was ruled by a communist-orientated junta government known as “The Derg”. Their political stance earned them the support of the Russian Federation, who provided them with military and financial aid. However, their mutual alliance began to weaken when Russia attempted to further their relations with Somalia, an enemy of Ethiopia. The fact that Ethiopia also purchased weaponry from the USA didn’t help matters.

USA: as mentioned above, the USA sold weaponry and fighter planes to Ethiopia. In addition, it formulated an ultimately unsuccessful peace plan in collaboration with Rwanda, and actively supported a peaceful resolution between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Timeline of Events

1962 - Ethiopia, under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, annexes Eritrea; Eritrea's war of independence begins.

1993 - Eritrea becomes independent of Ethiopia.

1998 - Eritrea takes over the Ethiopian-administered town of Badme, instigating the war.

1998, 26th June - The UN Security Council publishes Resolution 1177.

1999, 27th February - Eritrea agrees to the OAU peace plan after Ethiopia breaks through their defences. Ethiopia demands that they withdraw from all contested territory, an act Eritrea refuses to perform. The fighting continues.

2000, 12th May - Ethiopia once again enters Eritrea, cutting off their supply lines. Eritrea finally agrees to Ethiopia's demands. The war is declared over.

2000, June - The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement is signed and the Temporary Security Zone is established.

2000, July - The Security Council establishes the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).

2000, September - The Security Council increases UNMEE's troop levels to 4,200.

2000, December - The Algiers Peace Agreement is signed.

Previous Attempt to Solve the Issue

On 18 June 2000, the parties agreed to a comprehensive peace agreement and binding arbitration of their disputes under the Algiers Agreement. A 25-kilometre-wide Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) was established within Eritrea, patrolled by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) from over 60 countries.

On 12 December 2000, a peace agreement was signed by the two governments.

On 13 April 2002, the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission agreed upon a "final and binding" verdict. The ruling awarded some territory to each side, but Badme (the flashpoint of the conflict) was awarded to Eritrea. Both countries vowed to accept the decision wholeheartedly the day after the ruling was made official. A few months later Ethiopia requested clarifications, then stated it was deeply dissatisfied with the ruling.

In September 2003 Eritrea refused to agree to a new commission, which they would have had to agree to if the old binding agreement was to be set aside and asked the international community to put pressure on Ethiopia to accept the ruling.

In November 2004, Ethiopia accepted the ruling of the Boundary Commission "in principle".

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