

# Major problems in ethiopia and eritrea history essay



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The purpose of this paper is to discuss and discover the major problems of the Border Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. I will discuss briefly about the major causes of the problem where and when it started. The casualties it had on the people of the two countries and what roles have been played by the international community to stop this conflict. Most of the things that are discussed in this paper might not be agreed by several people but my aim is to show most independent parties concluded and understood from the conflict between these countries.

## **Introduction**

To understand the border and territorial conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea one has to look back to at the late 19th century. In 1885 what is known as Eritrea today became the colony of Italy. In fact it became a very crucial Italian colonial empire in Africa. When Italy took the Eritrea then tension between Ethiopia and the Italian colony became very high. One of the major causes of the problems was the Ethiopians not being able to access the sea as they use to in the early times. Most of the Ethiopian trades both import and export through the Eritrean root were blocked by the Italian colony and this created a very high animosity between the two empires. Now a day's Ethiopia to import or export their products they have to arrange themselves with Djibouti where they pay a very high taxes compared to the Eritrean root. However, this wasn't the only problem, which the Italian colony created between the two countries. The Italians when they took the land of Eritrea they divided the Tigreans people in to two. The Tigreans which about form 40% the Eritrean population and about 7% of the Ethiopian population were divided in to two. Some of them went to the Eritrea and the others to

Ethiopia. Due to this division the Tigreans people lost the political power on both sides.

To know about this tribe is very important for understanding the Ethiopian Eretria conflict because the current government which governs Ethiopia is the Tigray People Liberation Front(TPLF) from tigray and also Eretria is governed by Eritrean People Liberation Front(EPLF), which is also a part of the tigray clan. One could imagine a very strong relationship between these two governments -they both have the same ethnicity and they both fought side by side to come to power. But today this is no more rather they became enemies to one another. I will explain to you the issue later.

After the Adwa war between Ethiopia and Italy in 1896 the relationship between the two countries was mainly a co-operative one. This co-operation lasted about 45 years and in 1935 the Italian army decided to occupy Ethiopia . However in 1941 the Ethiopians again defeated the Italians and with that loose the Italian empire in Africa was over. Prior to the invasion of Italy there were three treaties which were signed between the Ethiopians and Italians about the border. Whether theses treaties should be accepted or not in our modern world is heavily debated by both sides. The Ethiopian government says that those treaties have no value because the Italians broke the treaty between them by invading Ethiopia. So they wouldn't be accepting any treaties signed between Ethiopia and Italy. On the other had the Eritrean's, who have the Italian map, argue by saying we should apply the treaties and border agreement that were signed in 1896 between the two countries. Here are several maps that some of them the border has

pushed further to the south and where it moved more to Eritrea. However Eritrea wants to depend on the map of the Italians.

Even though there were several other differences between the two countries before the Italians arrive in to the region, but still one must be aware of the influence of the Italian colony on the relationship of the two countries. The Italians before they leave the region they built some very dangerous differences between the two brothers. The Italians colony succeeded to make the Eritrean brothers fight against the Ethiopian brothers. In the colonization time the Eritrea became the better Ethiopia. Of course, the colonial's sophisticated technologies and knowledge made the Eritrean's to be more developed than Ethiopians which were using the old traditional way of leaving. Eritreans created a small working class and their administrations also built up more. This created the kind of Eritreans that are being proud in their own identity. After the colony failed the Ethiopians wanted once again to include the Eritrea region to Ethiopia but they were rejected by the people of Eritrea, and this lead to the kind of the Eritreans identity which the post-Italian government under the EPLF wanted to widen. In short the colonial power Italy separated the two brothers and this division leaves many problems.

### Cause of the Conflict

We might ask ourselves that why these two governments fought against each other for such a small marginal land. The bigger part what was fought for is something about 100 km<sup>2</sup> big , the Badme area which is shaded in the map bellow. The Italians used a very tricky game when they included this

area in to their territory. As I explained above there were three treaties and Italy broke all the three when they invaded Ethiopia and occupied the Northern part of Ethiopia. What left was a big misunderstanding, and problem which never been solved. To whom it belong this land and who has the legitimacy to claim it?

After the Italians left the region, the area became under the administration of the Ethiopians. In 1970 this issue was discussed between the EPLF and TPLF and during this discussion the EPLF helped the TPLF against the ELF (Eretria liberation front) and later the Derg which governed Ethiopia from 1974 up to 1987. Then the border issue again was raised after the two parties TPLF and EPLF came to power. Both the parties with in the first five years in their power were very friendly and had very tight economical and political dependences. But in the end of 1996 this two governments started to became afraid of one another. The Eritreans products which were exported to Ethiopia started to have a very high competesion from inside Ethiopia. Also the Eritreans which were using the Ethiopian money wanted to create their own money (Nakfa), as; a result economical and political misunderstandings rose and this lead the two governments to feel treats against each other.

Source: International Boundaries Research Unit, Durham University, [www.dur.ac.uk/ibru](http://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru)

In August 1997 the issue of the border was raised by the Eritrean prime minster that sent an official letter to the Ethiopian prime minster Melees Zenawi. In the letter prime minster Isayas Afwarke of the Eretria mentioned

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that the bad border demarcation in the two countries should be taken in to consideration. Also he suggested a committee to look at this issue as soon as possible. As most political analysts agree, Eretria saw the border issue as possibility to put pressure on the Ethiopian government. Eretria wanted Ethiopia to make the current Ethiopian government to rethink their politics.

After that the demanded commissions meet on November 1997 to discuss on the border separation issue. In the meeting they couldn't came up with any tangible agreements rather the differences between the two countries raised more and more. In 6th of May 1998 they tried to meet again to discuss the issue more but while the second meeting was in progress some Eritrean soldiers entered in to the disputed zone. What then happened between the two countries can only be told by the nights that turned to a day and the lands that shock by the thousands of missiles and bombs' that were exchanged by the two countries. The Ethiopians say the aggression started by the Eritreans but on the other hand the Eritreans say the Ethiopian police who were in the border where the one who started the problem. Either ways the Eritreans were prepared for that aggression. The Eritreans already had a massive army which was ready for this and started to enter the Badme side. Eritreans wanted the Ethiopians to start the negotiation but the Ethiopian prime minister instead warned with all activities that are necessary on the 11th of May 1998. Then both the countries prepared them self for the war and the war started.

### Mediation Process

In this time several third parties tried to make negotiations between the two countries in order to solve the border conflict. In May 1998, both Ethiopia and Eritrea accepted a diplomatic team from US and Rwanda. The commission tried to solve the situation in a discussion as a democratic border issue. They never wanted to analyze or look deeper on the major causes of the conflict or any other casualties. Rather they wanted to just focus on the border issue and its demarcations. The US-Rwanda delegations asked both the parties to withdraw from the disputed zone in order to start discussions and give decisions. The Ethiopians side accepted the suggestion of the US-Rwanda team but the Eritreans asked for more clarifications.

It was this time that Ethiopians which were backed by the US\_RWANDA team seemed to start to make a strategic game. Ethiopians started to mobilize more army in to the region . On June 5th, Ethiopian air force start bombing the capital city of Eritrean airport. Then the Eritreans reply was by bombing Mekelle city schools and markets. In this attack several students and civilians died. The OAU, which head quarter was in Addis Ababa wasn't welcomed by the Eritrean government as a mediator of the conflict because they saw unjust peace plan which was standing on one side. The Eritrean government accused the OAU of being biased and asked the UN to be involved and make the mediation between the two countries. However, the UN felt that the best way to solve this problem is through the Organization of African Unity (OAU). After that several meetings and diplomatic negotiations were held but all of them failed to solve the conflict. On 27th of January 1999 the Ethiopian prime minister gave forewarning war and on 5th of February 1999 Ethiopia started a very heavy offensive attack on Eritrea.

## Casualties

These two poor countries wasted millions of dollars in the war and had very severe casualties. Eritrea side claimed that they lost about 19, 000 of its soldiers in the battle but the most of the international community reported the amount of total death from both sides is about 70, 000 soldiers. Also there are some other reports which say the total death from both sides were about 100, 000 soldiers.

Moreover, Eritreans were accused of using some prohibited weapons. Eritreans also accused the Ethiopians of using “ Human wave” but according to the independents there were no human waves used in the war rather Ethiopians victory was because they outnumbered the Eritrean soldiers in both number and weapons.

Tens of thousands of people were expelled from both countries during the war and never got a proper compensation from both sides. Ethiopians expelled about 77, 000 Eritreans and Eritreans expelled about 8, 000 Ethiopians. As the UN human right watch reported there were many people who couldn't afford the travelling money to their country and suffered discriminations and torture from both sides.

The economies of both countries weakened up more. Even before the war both the countries suffered several conflicts, drought and famine for decades. And just after six years of them coming to power this two countries fought an Unforgettable war which placed the two countries in the bottom of the world economy.



In conclusions, the conflict between Ethiopia and Eretria caused physiological, political and economical disaster on both the population and governments of the two countries. Still both sides see each other as enemies to one another and day to day there are several propagandas and threats happening between them. Either sides are not willing to change their position in the issue and don't want to make any diplomatic talks regarding the border issues. After the defeat of the Eritreans the UN peace keepers started to build what they call the security zone along the common border. However when these security keepers leave the border no one would be watching this two countries and what will happen between these two countries is too obvious to guess