

## Origin of the Conflict



The conflict began in September 1961, when an Eritrean group led by Hamid Idris Awate started a shootout against the Ethiopian army and police who were on the border that separates the two countries. A year later, Emperor Haile Selassie, based on his authoritarian power, dissolved the Eritrean parliament and annexed the two areas again extending the area of Ethiopia. After the coup that led to the deportation of the emperor in 1974 the country was in the hands of a new government named Derg, with which the country lost much of the Soviet influence that it had obtained during the time of Selassie. That's when the Eritrean Liberation Front, the armed group that strengthened during previous years, entered the Ethiopian territory, where they were captured by the local army.

The most important battles were the Battle of Barentu, in 1977, when the Ethiopian army stopped an invasion of Eritrea on the side of Somalia, and the Battle of Afabet in which the progress in the field of Ethiopian forces allowed the establishment of an Ethiopian army headquarters in south-western Eritrea. In the late 80's, the Ethiopian government lost all of the Soviet support it had, as the communist country's authorities refused to renew the agreement of defense and cooperation they had with the government of Mengistu Haile Mariam. When international aid ran out, the hopes of the Ethiopian army collapsed, and the Eritrean Liberation Front took advantage of this to advance their positions in the Ethiopian territory and ended up getting, in 1991, a referendum which two years later gave them independence from Ethiopia.

However, both parties' agreement was not completely clear on several points concerning the definite jurisdiction of the shared border. This ambiguity led to the Eritrean troops' occupation and annexation of the region of Badme, in May 6th, 1998. This resulted in minor clashes that helped Eritrea accuse Ethiopia for the murder of several officials and invade its neighbor with a large number of forces. Ethiopia declared war and mobilized its army to fight back, starting a new aggressive conflict that lasted just over two years, until June 2000. Since then, both sides have accumulated a large number of troops along the shared border, but there has not been any kind of confrontation so far.

**Internal Actors**

**External Actors**

Current eritrean regime  
Eritrean Liberation Front  
Ethiopian regime and army

UN Security Council UN  
Algeria  
Somalia  
African Union

**Current Situation**

In March 2011, Foreign Ministry spokesman Dina Mufti told Reuters that Eritrea tried to coordinate attacks inside Ethiopia during an African Union summit in February 2011, and that Addis Ababa had asked the West to pressure Asmara into “refraining”. Some diplomats say the planned attacks were of a sufficient scale to seriously worry Addis Ababa – Africa’s diplomatic core. “If they (international community) don’t heed, then we will take all measures necessary to defend ourselves,” Dina said. While diplomats downplay the chances of an Ethiopian attack – Addis Ababa is one of the largest recipients of Western aid — rumors are widespread in the capital that authorities are considering taking “strong measures” before the Ethiopian winter kicks in.

Some say, though, the posturing is only meant to scare the United Nations into tightening sanctions on Eritrea and to ensure the West continues to freeze the country out of the international community. Meles’ critics, however, claim he is trying to divert the attention of his countrymen to avoid North African-style unrest in a country where high living costs and unemployment are taking their toll. The greater question right now is: Are we in the process of initiation of a second war between Ethiopia and Eritrea?

### **UN's Position**

With increasing frequency, the UN makes calls for measures to consolidate peace and normalize relations between the countries of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The UN Security Council set up UNMEE to maintain contact with the parties and establish a mechanism to confirm the ceasefire. The UN sent UNMEE to monitor the ceasefire and help ensure the observance of security commitments. The UN recognizes the independence of both countries and promises to do everything that is in their hands to maintain the peace.

### **More Information**

- <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/21/us-ethiopia-eritrea-idUSTRE73K3OM20110421>
- <http://ethionetblog.blogspot.com/2011/04/ethiopiaeritrea-another-war.html>

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