

Observation no: 205

Country-year: 1997

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

Isais Afwerki took office as the President of Eritrea in 1991 with the establishment of the country of Eritrea in a revolutionary armed struggle—led by Afwerki and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

Afwerki has been the sole leader of the country since it gained its independence in 1991.

3. Is the country’s top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Afwerki led the armed contingent of the EPLF in their struggle to gain independence.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader’s ethnic or sectarian background?

No.

While I didn’t find direct evidence about the officer corps, the National Constitution requires conscription for all Eritrean citizens and views military service as a way to inculcate an Eritrean identity for all ethnicities.¹

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

¹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., *Eritrea*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), pg. 317.

I could find no evidence of ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps, though the vast preponderance of military officers at this time were previously aligned with the EPLF revolutionary movement and were therefore aligned closely with the ruling party and shared similar ideological backgrounds.²

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

There was significant debate within the formation of the professional Eritrean military forces about the relationship between the military and the party. Though senior military officers were not required to be a member of the PFDJ, and in fact were not allowed to be actively engaged in party politics, there is effectively no multi-party system in Eritrea. Therefore, quite often Eritrean senior military officers were also former or current active party members.³

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

The Eritrean military training was originally designed as a political education institution meant to create a sense of Eritrean national identity and so focused on the propagation of norms of Eritrean political nationalism.⁴

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

While I was unable to find specific instances tied to the military and use of force to put down internal dissent, human rights reports from 1999 as well as anecdotal reporting suggest that the some members, if not units, of the military were used in an ad hoc manner to put down internal dissent. These activities included actions against Islamic jihadist groups along the border as well as killings and imprisonment of ethnic and opposition political groups.⁵

² Robin Luckham, "Soldiers, Armies, and the Nation-State in Ethiopia and Eritrea," in Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation-Building in the Age of Democracy*, (London: Zed Books, 2002), pg. 257.

³ Luckham, "Soldiers, Armies, and the Nation-State in Ethiopia and Eritrea," pg. 257.

⁴ Tesfagiorgis G., *Eritrea*, pg. 317.

⁵ Kjetil Tronvoll and Daniel R. Mekonnen, *The African Garrison State: Human Rights and Political Development in Eritrea*, (Rochester: James Currey, 2014); and "Eritrea:

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

Afwerki's PFDJ ruled the country under civilian authority from 1992-1997.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

I could find no evidence of any paramilitary organizations.⁶

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I could find no evidence of an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

While the Eritrean military went through a significant slimming down after gaining its independence from Ethiopia in 2003, these cut backs could not be characterized as purges and were largely restricted to the enlisted and middle management of the military.⁷

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," *U.S. Department of State*, February 23, 2000, accessed 21 May 2015 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/245.htm>

⁶ "Country Profile—Eritrea," *Library of Congress—Federal Research Division I*, Sept. 2005, accessed 21 May 2015

<http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Eritrea%20Profile.pdf>.

⁷ Luckham, "Soldiers, Armies, and the Nation-State in Ethiopia and Eritrea," pg. 255.

No.

I could find no evidence of an institutionalized forum; anecdotal reporting indicates that the military reports directly to the President.⁸

⁸ Jason Warner, "Eritrea's military unprofessionalism and US security assistance in the Horn of Africa," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 24, no.4 (696-711).