

## THE ERITREAN DIASPORA AND ITS IMPACT ON REGIME STABILITY: RESPONSES TO UN SANCTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of UN-imposed sanctions on the stability of the Eritrean regime, with a focus on the reaction of the diaspora. It explores the transnational nature of Eritrean society and examines the history and structure of the Eritrean diaspora as well as its transformation since the political crisis of 2001. The article demonstrates that the government, as well as both its supporters and its opponents in the diaspora, have all instrumentalized sanctions for their own purposes. The government has used sanctions to rally supporters “around the flag”, calling on the diaspora to raise funds to negate their effect. By contrast, opposition activists have campaigned against the 2 percent “diaspora tax” levied by the government, arguing that it may be used for illicit military purposes in breach of the sanctions regime. In this sense, the sanctions have destabilized a core component of the regime’s resource base. However, the failure of the diasporic opposition to organize a joint campaign to persuade host governments to outlaw the collection of the tax has undermined its efforts. Funds raised through the diaspora tax thus continue to flow into government coffers, playing a stabilizing role in spite of the UN sanctions regime.

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THE UNITED NATIONS IMPOSED SANCTIONS on the state of Eritrea in 2009 to counter the government’s support of armed groups in the Horn of Africa region, including the radical Al-Shabaab militias in Somalia and insurgencies against the Ethiopian government. In addition, the government of Eritrea had failed to acknowledge the existence of a border dispute with Djibouti and to release Djiboutian prisoners of war. The UN tightened the sanctions in 2011 by demanding that the government should stop using coercive practices to collect the diaspora tax, and that it should refrain from using these funds to destabilize the Horn of Africa.

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This article examines the impact of sanctions on the stability of the Eritrean regime,<sup>1</sup> focusing on the reactions of different segments of the diaspora to their imposition. It is commonly assumed that the impact of sanctions on autocratic regimes is relatively weak,<sup>2</sup> and the reactions of diaspora communities to them are an under-researched topic. This article explores the transnational character of Eritrean society, which is characterized by “long-distance” nationalism. It argues that both government supporters and opponents have instrumentalized the sanctions as symbolic capital. The sanctions are aimed at diminishing Eritrea’s military capacity to support insurgencies in the Horn of Africa, and not directly at weakening the Eritrean government, but they challenge the regime’s ability to raise funds from the diaspora, which may be used for purposes forbidden under the sanctions regime. One of the central arguments put forward by Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph Wright is that personal rulers are specifically vulnerable to sanctions because they usually depend on external revenues to fund their patronage networks.<sup>3</sup> Given that the political system in Eritrea is increasingly characterized by personal rule and that it depends heavily on diaspora remittances, including a 2 percent tax levied by the government, we could expect a decline in revenue derived from the diaspora to contribute indirectly to the demise of Eritrea’s regime.<sup>4</sup>

The article draws on knowledge gained through long-term participant observation among Eritrean diaspora communities for almost three decades and prolonged stays inside the country between 1995 and 2010. This ethnographic approach provided the author with insights into Eritrea as seen through the lens of the diaspora, as well as from the perspective of those who live inside the country. In addition, the article draws on five in-depth interviews with Eritreans in opposition to the current regime, as well as official government statements and media reports covering sanctions-related events.

The first part of the article provides a review of Eritrea’s short history as an independent nation, its foreign policy, and the imposition of UN sanctions. The second part analyses Eritrea as a transnational society, focusing on the political culture of the diaspora and its cleavages in terms of a spectrum of political opinion and duration of exile. The third part then deals

1. The term ‘regime’ refers to an authoritarian government and in this article is used interchangeably with the term ‘government’.

2. David Lektzian and Mark Souva, ‘An institutional theory of sanctions onset and success’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, 6 (2007), pp. 848–87.

3. Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph Wright, ‘Dealing with tyranny: International sanctions and the survival of authoritarian rulers’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 54 (2010), pp. 335–59, p. 336.

4. Petros B. Ogbazhi, ‘Personal rule in Africa: the case of Eritrea’, *African Studies Quarterly* 12, 2 (2011), pp. 1–25, <<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v12/v12i2a1.pdf>> (5 April 2013). For details on the contribution of remittances to the country’s GDP, see footnote 39.

with diaspora reactions to the sanctions regime. The conclusion argues that the effect of sanctions on internal political stability has been limited and indirect. However, the combination of a number of other trends such as the militarization of society, a mass exodus of people, and an isolationist foreign policy have weakened the government's hold on power.

*Eritrea: from a "beacon of hope" to a pariah state*

Twenty-one years after its independence, the Eritrean state is in a steady decline. The country's people suffer from chronic shortages of drinking water, electricity, fuel, and basic consumer goods. Adult Eritreans are forced to serve in the military or the national service for indefinite time periods, which forces thousands to flee the country every month and join the diaspora.

The state of Eritrea came into existence after a 30-year struggle for independence. In 1952 the former Italian colony was federated with Ethiopia, which annexed Eritrea in 1962. In 1961, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) launched an armed struggle for independence, and in the early 1970s the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) split from the ELF and eventually became the dominant force.<sup>5</sup> It established a stronghold among Eritrean war refugees by extending its mass organizations to all countries with a significant Eritrean exile population. In 1991 the EPLF defeated the Ethiopian army and took control of the government. The country was recognized internationally as an independent nation in 1993, and the EPLF renamed itself the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) in 1994.

During the struggle, the EPLF did not receive support from either the Eastern bloc or Western governments. This led to two structural characteristics of the EPLF/PFDJ government: the insistence on self-reliance coupled with deep mistrust towards the international community, and the institutionalization of the diaspora as a funding source. The government introduced a diaspora tax for all Eritreans living abroad, which stood at 2 percent of their annual income no matter whether it was derived from work or social welfare benefits. The diaspora tax was applied to people of Eritrean origin who had been naturalized by their host countries but were still considered as nationals by the Eritrean government and were thus supposed to pay. The purpose of the tax was to foster the reconstruction of the war-devastated country. Regular payment of the levy was a precondition of access to consular and other government services. At the time of independence, the victorious EPLF was broadly welcomed as the new government

5. David Pool, *From guerrillas to government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (James Currey, Oxford, 2001).

by Eritrean society, and most diaspora Eritreans volunteered to contribute their share to the development of their homeland. At that time, most observers envisaged the emergence of a positive development path.<sup>6</sup>

The first critical juncture occurred when conflicts between the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments developed into an all-out war in 1998,<sup>7</sup> which cost about 100,000 lives. The post-war period has been marked by the implementation of three policies that thoroughly changed the face of Eritrea. The first was a political move from a more moderate form of authoritarianism towards a system with totalitarian tendencies. The second was the militarization of society, which was justified on the basis of the prevailing conflict with Ethiopia. The third was the evolution of an increasingly isolationist foreign policy. The remainder of this section deals with each development in turn.

In the aftermath of the war, fifteen high-ranking PFDJ members (the "G15") publicly demanded political reforms. However, President Isaias Afewerki cracked down on the group and arrested eleven of them in September 2001, along with most of the journalists from the independent press. Following these events, the political system shifted towards totalitarianism.<sup>8</sup> Elections were postponed indefinitely and the constitution (ratified in 1997) was disregarded. Ultimately, President Isaias's decision to deliberately weaken the PFDJ and its mass organizations for workers, women, and the youth has undermined the ability of the party to maintain control through co-optation and surveillance of the population.

As a result of the process of increasing militarization, the major-generals of the Eritrean army gained considerable influence over the administration. They became involved in illegal activities such as smuggling and human trafficking. The government severely curtailed all private business activities, and the economy has been monopolized by the party and the military, both of whom use national service conscripts as unpaid labourers in their commercial enterprises. In 2002, the government extended the mandatory national service from 18 months to a period of indefinite duration. The service includes forced labour in construction projects for PFDJ-owned

6. See for instance Ruth Iyob, 'The Eritrean experiment: A cautious pragmatism?', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, 4 (1997), pp. 647–74; Marina Ottawa, *Africa's new leaders: Democracy or state-reconstruction?* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, 1999).

7. For details see, for example, Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at war: Making sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war* (James Currey, Oxford, 2000).

8. For a definition of totalitarianism see Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2000), p. 67. Several scholars have described the Eritrean political system as totalitarian; examples include Kjetil Tronvoll, *The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea: Human rights and political development, 1991–2009* (Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Oslo, 2009), p. 19; Kidane Mengisteab and Yohannes Okbazghi, *Anatomy of an African tragedy: Political, economic and foreign policy crisis in post-independence Eritrea* (Red Sea Press, Trenton, NJ, 2005), p. 175.

companies or on cash crop farms run by the military.<sup>9</sup> Currently, several hundred thousands of people serve as recruits. They receive only pocket money and live under military discipline even when working in civil capacities.<sup>10</sup> This form of forced labour has turned Eritrea into one of the world's leading refugee-producing countries.

The ordeal of Eritrean refugees came to the attention of the international community when, in October 2013, a boat loaded with hundreds of refugees, most of them Eritreans, capsized near the Italian island of Lampedusa, and 360 people died. While many Europeans were shocked by the event and Italy declared a day of national mourning, the Eritrean government initially simply tried to cover up the fact that the victims of the tragedy had been Eritreans. Eritrean state television reported that over 300 'illegal African migrants' had died in Italy without making reference to their Eritrean nationality.<sup>11</sup> However, the international media coverage of the accident forced government officials to react, and on 9 October a government press statement tied the incident to 'criminal human traffickers' and accused the US government of being behind the smuggling of Eritreans.<sup>12</sup>

Eritrea has poor regional links, and the country has been involved in armed conflicts with all of its neighbours in the recent past (Yemen in 1995, Djibouti in 1996 and 2008, and Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000), with the exception of Sudan. The government has never fully entered into constructive working relationships with the African Union (AU) and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), whose members included Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda. Relations with Ethiopia were close until war broke out in 1998. Ever since then, a "no war, no peace" situation has prevailed, and the PFDJ regime has used the stalemate to legitimize the lack of democratization. The government also engaged in a proxy war with Ethiopia in Somalia by supporting the Al-Shabaab militias. In 2006 the Eritrean government suspended its seats at the IGAD and the AU, and in 2008 a build-up of Eritrean troops at the border with Djibouti led to an armed border clash between the two countries.

9. Nicole Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh, "Dreams don't come true in Eritrea": Anomie and family disintegration due to the structural militarisation of society', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51, 1 (2013), pp. 139–68; Human Rights Watch, 'Service for life: State repression and indefinite conscription in Eritrea', April 2009, <<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/82280/section/6>> (7 October 2009); Gaim Kibreab, 'Forced labour in Eritrea', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, 1 (2009), pp. 41–72.

10. David Bozzini, 'Low-tech surveillance and the despotic state of Eritrea', *Surveillance and Society* 9, 1–2 (2011), pp. 93–113.

11. Awate, 'Isaias regime and Lampedusa: a week late, a weak explanation', 10 October 2013, <<http://awate.com/isaias-regime-and-lampedusa-a-week-late-a-weak-explanation/>> (10 October 2013).

12. Government of Eritrea, 'Press statement', Asmara, 9 October 2013, <<http://www.shabait.com/news/local-news/14893-press-statement-by-the-government-of-eritrea>> (9 October 2013).

In response to President Isaias's aggressive and isolationist foreign policy, in May 2009 IGAD called on the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Eritrea, accusing it of supporting criminal elements in Somalia, and the AU joined its call. Ethiopia made use of its influential position in both organizations to push for the sanctions. In July, the AU summit in Sirte, Libya adopted a resolution to pressure the UN for sanctions, and one month later the ambassadors to the UN of Great Britain, the US, and Russia recommended that the Security Council give the AU's request serious consideration. The Council adopted the sanctions regime as UN Resolution 1907, with only one abstention (China) and one rejection (Libya).<sup>13</sup> The "smart sanctions" included an arms embargo, the freezing of foreign assets, and a travel ban on the ruling elite. The UN justified the sanctions on the grounds that the Eritrean government supported armed groups that undermine peace and reconciliation in Somalia, and that it refused to withdraw its troops from the Djiboutian border. The sanctions were intended to destroy the country's military capability to support insurgencies in Ethiopia and the Al-Shabaab militias in Somalia.

In December 2011, the UN Security Council expanded the sanctions through UN Resolution 2023, which demands that the Eritrean government stop using its diaspora tax to destabilize the Horn region and ceases to apply coercion in collecting the money. While the arms embargo has been widely implemented by UN member states, so far no individuals have been singled out for travel bans and asset freezes.

The government's reaction to the imposition of sanctions corresponded to its established pattern of blaming anti-Eritrean conspiracy theories. President Isaias attacked the US for being the mastermind behind the 'illegal and unjust' sanctions.<sup>14</sup> The government rejected the accusation of having supported Al-Shabaab militias, but it agreed to the mediation of Qatar in its border conflict with Djibouti. However, as of July 2014, no progress had been made in demarcating the contested border. The 2012 report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea states that the Eritrean government discontinued direct support to al-Shabaab but failed to comply with the sanction resolutions in most other regards. The regime continued *inter alia* to collect the 2 percent tax and other funds from the diaspora by using coercive tactics.<sup>15</sup>

13. Nicole Hirt, 'Eritrea', in Andreas Mehler and Klaas van Walraven (eds), *Africa Yearbook 2009* (Brill Online, Leiden 2010), <[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/africa-yearbook-online/eritrea-vol-6-2009-ayb2009\\_COM\\_0034](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/africa-yearbook-online/eritrea-vol-6-2009-ayb2009_COM_0034)>.

14. Nicole Hirt, 'Eritrea', in Andreas Mehler and Klaas van Walraven (eds), *Africa Yearbook 2010* (Brill, Leiden, 2011), pp. 321–30, p. 325.

15. Chair of the Security Council Committee, 'Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council' (UN Security Council, S/2012/545, New York, 11 July 2012), pp. 5–6.

*Transnational Eritrean society: “long-distance nationalism” and a divided diaspora*

Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville argue that in transnational societies political processes are significantly influenced by diaspora communities, and that political entrepreneurs, including the governments of migrant sending states, regard diaspora networks as instruments for mobilizing resources and use as a political lobby. In authoritarian environments, opposition parties recruit their constituencies among the diaspora, beyond the control of the state. However, opposition actors are not always pro-democracy, and non-democratic behaviour often thrives in the diaspora.<sup>16</sup> Fiona Adamson and Madelleine Demetriou argue that governments of sending states have discovered transnationalism as a political and economic potential and are embracing their emigrants by encouraging them to contribute to the homeland’s development. Transnational identity networks are maintained with the help of cultural symbols in music, art, and literature, which help to create an imagined community.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of diasporas on homeland politics is ambiguous. Hoehne, Feyissa, and Abdille describe a diaspora consisting of heterogeneous groups with significant ideological, religious, and ethnic differences.<sup>18</sup> These groups have the potential either to facilitate political reform or to cement the power of authoritarian regimes. Researchers assessing the impacts of diaspora on the homeland follow different threads. Some scholars regard diaspora communities as agents of change and explore their possible contribution to development.<sup>19</sup> Others focus on their role in either exacerbating or mediating conflicts,<sup>20</sup> while a few examine the political impact diasporas have on homeland politics.<sup>21</sup> The existing literature indicates that the role that diasporas can play is shaped by the type of government back home, the type of economic system (liberal or state-controlled),

16. Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville, ‘Introduction’, in Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville (eds), *Politics from afar: Transnational diasporas and networks* (Hurst, London, 2012), pp. 1–23.

17. Fiona B. Adamson and Madelleine Demetriou, ‘Remapping the boundaries of “state” and “national identity”: Incorporating diasporas into IR theorizing’, *European Journal of International Relations* 13, 4 (2007), pp. 489–526.

18. Markus V. Hoehne, Dereje Feyissa, and Mahdi Abdille, ‘Somali and Ethiopian diasporic engagement for peace in the Horn of Africa’, *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 1, 1 (2011), pp. 71–99, p. 73.

19. One example is Giles Mohan, ‘Embedded cosmopolitanism and the politics of obligation: The Ghanaian diaspora and development’, *Environment and Planning* 38, 5 (2006), pp. 867–83.

20. One example is Nauja Kleist, ‘Mobilising “the diaspora”: Somali transnational political engagement’, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, 2 (2008), pp. 307–23.

21. Examples include Lyons and Mandaville, *Politics from afar*, and Rey Koslowski, *International migration and the globalization of domestic politics* (Routledge, London, 2005).

and the reasons why people within the diaspora left their country (to flee repression and conflict or to gain economic opportunities).<sup>22</sup>

The Eritrean diaspora comprises at least a third of all Eritrean nationals. Over one million fled to foreign countries during the independence struggle.<sup>23</sup> The transnational orientation of Eritrean society – characterized by close economic, political, and symbolic ties between those outside the country and their place of origin<sup>24</sup> – can be traced back to the late 1970s when the EPLF created transnational structures by absorbing exiles into the ranks of its mass organizations to channel their participation in the war effort.<sup>25</sup> By 1980, the EPLF had established itself as a transnational organization comprised of a central political body, a military apparatus, and mass associations across the world. The organization of festivals and other events was an important tool for creating cultural symbols and strengthening the links between the exiles and the EPLF. In 1989, the EPLF replaced the mass organizations with purportedly apolitical community organizations, the so-called “*mahbere-koms*”.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, it made concerted efforts to incorporate Eritreans living in exile by introducing the 2 percent diaspora tax for all Eritreans living abroad, no matter if they retained their Eritrean citizenship or were naturalized by their host countries.

Many migrant-producing states preserve the citizenship of their emigrants, which Peggy Levitt and Rafael de la Dehesa describe as an extension of political rights, including the right to vote from overseas.<sup>27</sup> In the Eritrean case, the preservation of citizenship meant the extension of financial duties through ideological means and social pressure. However, during the initial years of independence most Eritreans abroad volunteered to pay the tax, which they saw as their just contribution to the reconstruction of the war-torn country.<sup>28</sup> Most Eritreans have maintained strong links not

22. Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, ‘Transnationalism, international migration and home’, in Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (eds), *New approaches to migration? Transnational communities and transformation of home* (Routledge, London, 2002), pp. 1–14.

23. World Bank, ‘Eritrea: Options and strategies for growth’ (World Bank Report No. 12930-ER, Washington, DC, 1994), p. ii.

24. See Christina Boswell and Oana Ciobanu, ‘Culture, utility or social systems? Explaining the cross-national ties of emigrants from Borsa, Romani’, in Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (eds), *Diasporas, cultures and identities* (Routledge, Oxford, 2012), pp. 46–7.

25. Tricia Redeker Hepner, ‘Transnational governance and the centralization of state power in Eritrea and exile’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, 3 (2008), pp. 476–502, p. 477; Katrin Radtke, *Mobilisierung der Diaspora: Die moralische Ökonomie der Bürgerkriege in Sri Lanka und Eritrea* (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/Main, 2009).

26. Khalid Koser, ‘Mobilizing new African diasporas: An Eritrean case study’, in Khalid Koser (ed.), *New African diasporas* (Routledge, London, 2003), pp. 111–23, p. 113.

27. Peggy Levitt and Rafael de la Dehesa, ‘Transnational migration and the redefinition of the state: variations and explanations’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, 4 (2003), pp. 587–611, p. 590.

28. Koser, ‘Mobilizing new African diasporas’, p. 114.

only to their kin at home but also to the state of Eritrea itself<sup>29</sup> – and even if many have become legal citizens of their host countries, their ‘emotional citizenship’ has remained firmly Eritrean.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, Bettina Conrad suggests that ‘long-distance nationalism’ might be a better term to use than ‘transnationalism’ when describing the Eritrean diaspora’s attitude towards their homeland.<sup>31</sup> This ideological bond expresses itself through certain actions, such as demonstrating, contributing money, and fighting for a “homeland” in which they have never actually lived.<sup>32</sup>

When the war with Ethiopia broke out in 1998, the Eritrean government tried to intensify its relations with a diaspora whose support it badly needed in order to meet the financial demands of the war. All existing transnational structures, including the embassies and consulates and the mostly dormant *mahbere-koms*, were mobilized both for fundraising purposes<sup>33</sup> and “ideological streamlining”. The state issued bonds to be purchased by the diaspora, which raised about US\$70 million, and made numerous demands for contributions.<sup>34</sup>

#### *The structural transformation of the diaspora since 2001*

Following the end of the war with Ethiopia, the government re-engaged with Eritreans abroad for two reasons. First, it was in urgent need of foreign exchange. Second, critical voices were being raised within Eritrea and its diaspora over the unsatisfactory outcome of the war and the failure to implement the constitution. The government tried to control rising criticism within the diaspora through a close-knit web of informants who reported all forms of dissent to the embassies.<sup>35</sup>

However, the political landscape of the diaspora had diversified since the end of the Eritro–Ethiopian war. Before the war, the diaspora had consisted mainly of government supporters and several ELF splinter groups. Following the crackdown on the G15 and the free press, the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) was founded by disillusioned PFDJ members, and throughout the past decade a variety of civil society and human rights

29. Nadjé Al-Ali, Richard Black, and Khalid Koser, ‘The limits to “transnationalism”: Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in Europe as emerging transnational communities’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, 4 (2001), pp. 578–600, p. 584.

30. Victoria Bernal, ‘Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online’, *Global Networks* 6, 2 (2006), pp. 161–79, p. 164.

31. Bettina Conrad, *‘We are the prisoners of our dreams’: Long-distance nationalism and the Eritrean diaspora in Germany* (University of Hamburg, unpublished PhD thesis, 2010), p. 19.

32. Nina Glick-Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Georges woke up laughing: Long distance nationalism and the search for home* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2001).

33. Redeker Hepner, ‘Transnational governance’, p. 486.

34. Samia Teclé, *The paradoxes of state-led transnationalism: Capturing continuity, change and rupture in the Eritrean transnational field* (York University, Toronto, MA thesis, 2012), p. 32.

35. Koser, ‘Mobilizing new African diasporas’, p. 117.

groups have arisen. As a reaction, the ruling elite established the Young PFDJ (YPFDJ) in 2004 as a meeting point for the pro-government diaspora youth.

Literature on international migration and transnationalism posits that migrants often play an important positive role by fostering societal and political debates in their home countries.<sup>36</sup> Fiona Adamson elaborates three ways in which diasporas can transform their homelands: they can try to initiate discourses that challenge or reinforce the hegemonic discourse of the home state regime; they can work for political change by raising international awareness; and they can transfer resources in order to alter the power balance at home.<sup>37</sup> Rey Koslowski remarks that emigrants and political refugees often have the ability to influence home-country politics disproportionately to their numbers because of their higher levels of education, financial capital, and possible influence on the host country's policies towards their homeland.<sup>38</sup> However, this has not been the case in Eritrea, even though the diaspora contributes an outstandingly high amount to annual per capita GDP compared to other remittance-receiving countries.<sup>39</sup> In 2004, an IMF Working Paper stated that 'private transfers from the Diaspora are the largest single source of foreign currency inflows into the country, with the ratio of these transfers to GDP averaging 37 percent over the last ten years. These levels of diaspora financing are clearly exceptional.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite this, the diaspora has been neither able nor willing to turn its financial indispensability to the government into political leverage. Although

36. Hein De Haas, 'International migration, remittances and development: Myths and facts', *Third World Quarterly* 26, 8 (2005), pp. 1269–84, p. 1272.

37. Fiona Adamson, 'Mobilizing for the transformation of home: Politicized identities and transnational practices', in Al-Ali and Koser (eds), *New approaches to migration?*, pp. 155–68, p. 156.

38. Rey Koslowski, 'International migration and the globalization of domestic politics', in Rey Koslowski (ed.), *International migration and the globalization of domestic politics* (London, Routledge, 2007), pp. 5–21, p. 8.

39. The contribution of remittances is consistently estimated at about one third of the country's GDP: Tekie Fessehazion, 'Eritrea's remittance-based economy: conjectures and musings', in Tricia Redeker Hepner and Bettina Conrad (eds), *Eritrea abroad: Critical perspectives on the global diaspora*, special issue of *Eritrean Studies Review* 4, 2 (2005), pp. 165–84, p. 168; Gaim Kibreab, 'The Eritrean diaspora, the war of independence, post-conflict (re)-construction and democratisation', in Ulf Johansson Dahre (ed.), *The role of diasporas in peace, democracy and development in the Horn of Africa* (Research Report in Social Anthropology 1, Lund University, 2007), pp. 97–115, pp. 103–4; David Styant, 'Discussion paper: The evolution, uses and abuses of remittances in the Eritrean economy' (Conference Proceedings, Eritrea's Economic Survival, London, Chatham House, 2007), pp. 13–22, p. 15. A Comoros-related World Bank Report confirms that 'in Africa, Comoros ranks second, after Eritrea, in terms of its dependence on remittances'. See Vincent da Cruz *et al.*, 'Remittances to Comoros – volume, trends, impact, and implications' (World Bank, World Bank Africa Region Working Paper Series 75, 2004), Abstract.

40. Ayumu Yamauchi, 'Fiscal sustainability: The case of Eritrea' (IMF Working Paper, WP/04/7, 2004), p. 10.

Khaled Koser observed frustration caused by the government's increased financial demands,<sup>41</sup> 'the diaspora, in spite of being the largest provider of foreign currency, has failed to counteract the emergence and consolidation of dictatorship. ... The government has effectively reduced the diaspora to a toothless cash cow.'<sup>42</sup>

The reactions of the diverse Eritrean diaspora groups to the sanctions can only be understood within the framework of their general patterns of political behaviour with regard to demands from the government. Thus, I shall first describe the techniques used to coerce Eritreans in exile to make contributions, either voluntarily – out of conviction or feelings of indebtedness – or involuntarily, out of the need for government services.

The most institutionalized way of "milking" the diaspora is the 2 percent tax levied on all Eritreans abroad. Eritrean embassies around the world have been keeping a record of the exact sums every Eritrean has paid since 1991 (the year of *de facto* independence). Those who pay the tax receive a clearance that enables them to enjoy government services such as obtaining birth and marriage certificates, the right to purchase land in Eritrea, to operate a business, or to get exit visas for elderly relatives. Yet the most important service for many diaspora Eritreans is the extension of passports, which mostly affects about 100,000 Eritreans who work in Middle Eastern countries, need valid documents to get work permits there, and are thus forced to pay *volens volens*.

Another important source of income can be subsumed under the term contributions, which includes collections for the Martyr's Trust Fund as well as money collected during fundraising parties that are regularly organized by the YPFDJ branches and by the embassies to mark national events such as Independence Day. A third source of income comes from selling land and houses to Eritreans abroad, who have to pay in hard currency. According to Tekie Fessehatzion, who had access to unpublished government figures, in 2003 the diaspora tax amounted to US\$10.4 million, contributions raised US\$25.6 million, and land purchases accounted for all of US\$47.5 million.<sup>43</sup>

Another important point is that diaspora Eritreans provide a survival network for their relatives at home in the face of the regime's unsustainable economic and social policies, since the prolonged military service has turned the Eritrean workforce into unpaid conscripts. In Ghana, the state also tries to capitalize on the social obligations felt by its migrants. Giles Mohan points out that Ghanaians are encouraged to contribute to the development of their areas of origin through hometown associations, which

41. Koser, 'Mobilizing new African diasporas', pp. 120–1.

42. Kibreab, 'The Eritrean diaspora', p. 111.

43. Fessehatzion, 'Eritrea's remittance-based economy', p. 174.

invest in infrastructure, schools, and social welfare, filling the gap caused by the retreat of the state.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, members of the US-based diaspora of war-torn Liberia support their relatives through the promotion of small business development.<sup>45</sup> However, such a strategy is diametrically opposed to the PFDJ's ideology. Rather, the ruling party tries to suppress hometown linkages, which it views as backward and regionalist, and has blocked all avenues of support to individual municipalities by obstructing the development of local civil society organizations. Thus, diaspora Eritreans can contribute to their kin's survival through cash remittances, but any engagement in business opportunities is virtually impossible. Consequently, they are increasingly financing the exodus of their relatives, including fees and ransoms charged by people smugglers and human traffickers.<sup>46</sup>

*The political culture of the Eritrean diaspora*

Government supporters often do not distinguish between Eritrea as a nation, the state of Eritrea as an institution, and the PFDJ under the leadership of Isaias as an organization that symbolizes the victorious independence struggle.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it is the conviction of many Eritreans that disloyalty to the government means betrayal of the nation and the people. These feelings are nurtured by the conspiracy theories spread by the ruling elite and by the enduring conflict with Ethiopia. Many diaspora Eritreans are more concerned with protecting Eritrea's sovereignty than with facing the truth about the dire internal situation. However, the role played by Ethiopia as a "fear factor" has lost much of its edge during recent years, especially among the younger generation, with the exception of YFPDJ members. For the older generation of exiled Eritreans, Terrence Lyons's description of 'conflict-generated diasporas' seems appropriate. Their picture of the homeland is often 'frozen in time or distorted by nostalgia rather than recent experience'<sup>48</sup> – a nostalgia that is inextricably linked to the independence struggle.

Samia Tecele, a young Eritrean academic raised in Canada, examines how the government's efforts to institutionalize feelings of belonging in the diaspora have generated a rift between the post-independence generations growing up in Eritrea and those born abroad. In order (symbolically) to

44. Mohan, 'Embedded cosmopolitanism', pp. 12–13.

45. Stephen C. Lubkemann, 'Liberian remittance relief and not-only-for-profit entrepreneurship – exploring the economic relevance of diasporas in post-conflict transitions', in J. Brinkerhoff (ed.), *Diasporas and international development: Exploring the potential* (Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Press, 2008), pp. 45–66.

46. Styan, 'Discussion paper: The evolution, uses and abuses of remittances', pp. 16–18.

47. Conrad, *We are the prisoners of our dreams*, p. 166.

48. Terrence Lyons, 'Conflict-generated diasporas and transnational politics in Ethiopia', *Conflict, Security and Development* 7, 4 (2007), pp. 529–49, p. 533.

incorporate second-generation Eritreans into the homeland, the PFDJ leadership created the YPFDJ as a hub for the reproduction of nationalism. It has been successful in mobilizing well-meaning diaspora youth concerned with Eritrea's future to stand 'patriotically aligned with the Government of Eritrea'. Thus, 'young diaspora Eritreans through the YPFDJ imagine their role as key transnational citizens of Eritrea seeking to "defend a nation under attack"'.<sup>49</sup> Meron Estefanos explains the high popularity that this organization enjoys among young people who grew up in democratic environments as follows:

The YPFDJ got more members after the sanctions. Many youths have an identity crisis, even when they are born in a country like Sweden, because of their colour. They are also getting angry and ask themselves 'why is everybody writing bad things about my country?' The regime can brainwash them and appeals to their patriotic feelings. It makes them feel important.<sup>50</sup>

While the state presents itself as inclusive and welcoming towards the diaspora youth, it shows its ugly face to the young generation inside Eritrea, which is exploited through the practice of indefinite national service, thrown into jail, shot by border commandos while trying to flee, or left to their fate as victims of human trafficking. Jennifer Riggan calls this phenomenon 'Eritrea's version of graduated sovereignty', in which the state disciplines its subjects inside the country in order to groom a docile labour force, and simultaneously cultivates the loyalty of the diaspora in pleasurable ways while reminding it of its duties towards the nation.<sup>51</sup> This results in a hierarchy of citizenship where diaspora Eritreans enjoy a higher status than locals, which increases the esteem in which they hold the nation state and makes them 'more than happy to do what the sovereign asks of them ... at the expense of the captive citizens inside Eritrea'.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, there is a deep rift between the thousands of newly arriving refugees and those who grew up away from their homeland, including sharp differences *vis-à-vis* the perception of reality: 'Some mourn what has become of the country while others celebrate blissfully.'<sup>53</sup>

Generally, the notion that an internal cohesion and sense of unity exists within the diaspora – as claimed by Al-Ali, Black, and Koser – is a fiction.<sup>54</sup>

49. Teclé, *The paradoxes of state-led transnationalism*, p. 46.

50. Interview, Meron Estefanos, Radio Erena and co-founder of Arbi Harnet ('Freedom Friday'), Stockholm, 29 April 2013; see also Radtke, *Mobilisierung der Diaspora*, p. 156.

51. Jennifer Riggan, 'Imagining emigration: Debating national duty in Eritrean classrooms', *Africa Today* 60, 2 (2013), pp. 90–1.

52. Tekle M. Woldemikael, 'Introduction: postliberation Eritrea', *Africa Today* 60, 2 (2013), pp. v–xix, p. xv.

53. Teclé, *The paradoxes of state-led transnationalism*, p. 56.

54. Al-Ali, Black, and Koser, 'The limits to "transnationalism"', p. 594.

Today, the diaspora can be divided roughly into four groups: permanent exiles, mostly ELF veterans; former PFDJ supporters who became dissidents and are now in a second exile; the large group of youth who left the country illegally and can be called the new exiles; and individuals with only loose political affiliations or no affiliation at all.<sup>55</sup>

These rifts are exacerbated by splits along divides of ethnicity, region of origin, and religion, which are all important in Eritrean political identity formation.<sup>56</sup> As Hoehne, Feyissa, and Abdille remark, ‘the differences within a particular diaspora partly mirror the fragmented social and political landscape of the homeland and partly emanate from different sets of diasporic experiences in the host country’.<sup>57</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to give a detailed account of all Eritrean opposition parties in exile, which include an estimated 34 organizations.<sup>58</sup> Among the most prominent youth movements are the Eritrean Youth Solidarity for Change and the Arbi Harnet (“Freedom Friday”) initiative, which aims at mobilizing the youth inside Eritrea against the regime. In addition, a large number of civil society movements that promote human and democratic rights have emerged.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of pro- and anti-government transnational political organizations is the relative homogeneity of the government’s supporters, most of them Christian Tigrinya, who are united in their view of Eritrea as a ‘besieged miracle land’<sup>59</sup> and appear as one united political bloc. On the other hand, the opposition is characterized by divisions and mutual mistrust. In between the two camps stands a silent majority, which can be subdivided into passive government supporters, passive critics, and those who have disengaged from Eritrean nationalism altogether. It can be assumed that most of those in the apolitical grouping still send private remittances, which indirectly support the government.<sup>60</sup>

55. Conrad, ‘*We are the prisoners of our dreams*’, p. 22; see also Khalid Koser, ‘Refugees, transnationalism and the state’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, 2, (2007), pp. 233–54; Simon M. Weldehaimanot, ‘Eritrea’s diaspora in regional peace and human rights’, *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights* 18, 1 (2012), pp. 185–6.

56. See Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, *The Saho of Eritrea: Ethnic identity and national consciousness* (Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2013).

57. Hoehne, Feyissa, and Abdille, ‘Somali and Ethiopian diasporic engagement’, p. 78.

58. Interview, Arhe Hamednaca, Swedish Member of Parliament and co-founder of the Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement, Stockholm, 29 April 2013.

59. The term ‘miracle land’ was popularized by Illen Ghebrai in *Eritrea: Miracleland* (published by the author, Washington DC, 1995).

60. For an account of the motives of diaspora Somalis who regard remitting money as a deeply entrenched social obligation, a fact which also applies to Eritrea, see Laura Hammond, ‘Obliged to give: Remittances and the maintenance of transnational networks between Somalis at home and abroad’, *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 10 (2010), pp. 125–51.

*Reactions to sanctions by government supporters*

The Isaias regime used the sanctions as a way to rally supporters “around the flag” and to remobilize the diaspora communities, who had become tired of its continuous financial demands. The PFDJ resorted to an instrument of the liberation struggle, calling for a ‘resolute national rebuff’.<sup>61</sup> In February 2010 the regime organized demonstrations against the sanctions at the UN’s headquarters in Geneva, as well as in Washington, DC, San Francisco, and Canberra. It is unclear how many Eritreans participated in these events, but the claims made by government sources that ‘hundreds of thousands participated’ seem grossly overestimated.<sup>62</sup> According to police statements, some 5,000 participants from all over Europe took part in the Geneva demonstration and the BBC reported ‘thousands’ of participants across the world.<sup>63</sup> However, it seems that the staging of public protests against the sanctions has gradually run out of steam and has had no tangible effect on international public opinion.<sup>64</sup>

The most important part of the regime’s national rebuff strategy is related to fundraising. By suggesting that the sanctions imply an immediate threat to the nation, members of the government held numerous seminars in all countries with a significant diaspora population. The participants are supposed to make donations ‘in support to programs of national development and reinforcing the staunch national rebuff’.<sup>65</sup>

Ironically, the government’s recent involvement in the trafficking of its own people by handing them over to Bedouins who hold them hostage on the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and extort ransoms of up to US\$50,000 per refugee has had a negative effect on the pro-government factions’ willingness to give.<sup>66</sup> First, the government supporters’ own relatives may be among the thousands of victims and they have to protect their savings from the continuous financial demands of the regime in order to be able to pay if

61. ‘Resolute national rebuff’ is the translation of the Tigrinya term *hzbawi mekhet*, which can also be translated as ‘popular defence’ or ‘popular resistance’.

62. See, for instance, *Blip TV*, ‘Eritreans from all over Europe stage demonstrations’, 22 February 2010, <<http://blip.tv/estaftro/video-eritreans-from-all-over-europe-stage-demonstration-in-geneva-denouncing-vicious-us-sanctions-resolution-part-i-3276530>> (11 June 2013).

63. *Adal Voice*, ‘Police [in] Geneva said 5,000 people took part in the process peacefully’, 22 February 2010, <<http://adalvoice.wordpress.com/2010/02/22/police-geneva-said-5000-people-took-part-in-the-protest-peacefully/>> (11 June 2013); *BBC News*, ‘Eritrea rally against UN sanctions’ <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8528007.stm>> (11 June 2013).

64. Interview, Dr Mohammed Kheir, former dean at the College of Agriculture, University of Asmara and political activist, Oslo, 6 April 2013.

65. See for instance Eritrea Ministry of Information, ‘Eritrean nationals residing in Goteborg and its environs conduct meeting on resolute rebuff’, 29 January 2012, <<http://shabait.com/news/local-news/8301-eritrean-nationals-residing-in-goteborg-and-its-environs-conduct-meeting-on-resolute-rebuff->> (2 August 2013).

66. Mirjam van Reisen, Meron Estefanos, and Conny Rijken, ‘Human trafficking in the Sinai: Refugees between life and death’ (Wolf Legal Publishers, Brussels, 2012), p. 1.

need be. Second, the awareness created by the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group and by diaspora civil society groups in relation to these practices has had a deterring effect, especially on less enthusiastic PFDJ supporters. The Lampedusa Tragedy of October 2013 and the heartless reaction of the government greatly accelerated this process.

While the sanctions did not appeal strongly to the emotions of the diaspora, the drowning of hundreds of young Eritreans and the obvious lack of empathy shown by the government spoke directly to the feelings of diaspora Eritreans, including government supporters. One of the most popular Eritrean singers, Yohannes 'Wedi Tikabo' was on a government-sponsored tour in the US when the disaster happened. He defected in protest against the ongoing party mood of PFDJ officials in the face of the tragedy – conceivably a landmark decision that may influence the attitude of his fans among the pro-government youth.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Dr Tewolde Tesfamariam, better known as 'Wedi Vaccaro', a wealthy businessman and former government supporter, was prompted by the event to engage in an international anti-regime campaign; his seminars were attended by thousands of Eritreans.<sup>68</sup>

#### *Reactions to the sanctions by the opposition camp*

Initially, PFDJ dissidents in the diaspora were reluctant to welcome the sanctions because they were still at odds with the Ethiopian government, which had initiated their imposition, while other opposition groups welcomed them, especially the ELF factions and the youth movements. During field research, I conducted five interviews with diaspora Eritreans opposed to the government hailing from different ethnic, regional, and religious backgrounds, and with different political affiliations. All of the interviewees supported the sanctions, but for different reasons: they contribute to the international isolation of the regime and work psychologically against the ruling elite;<sup>69</sup> they will have a negative impact on new investments in the mining sector<sup>70</sup> and will increase the shortage of hard currency by curtailing diaspora payments to the regime;<sup>71</sup> and they raise awareness among the

67. 'Breaking news: Yohannes Tikabo, a famous Eritrean artist, abandons the dictatorial PFDJ regime in Eritrea', <<http://assenna.com/yohannes-tikabo-a-famous-eritrean-artist-defects-the-dictatorial-pfdj-regime-in-eritrea/comment-page-1/>> (19 October 2013).

68. See, for instance, a seminar held by Dr Tewolde Tesfamariam (Wedi Vaccaro) in Frankfurt, Germany, 26 February 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gboY3GiPWk>> (5 April 2014).

69. Interview, Arhe Hamednaca, Stockholm, 29 April 2013.

70. Interview, Meron Estefanos, Stockholm, 29 April 2013.

71. Interview, Dr Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, former Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Asmara, now Senior Researcher, Oslo and Akershus University College, Oslo, 1 April 2013.

people inside Eritrea and help to mobilize those living abroad, especially the youth.<sup>72</sup> Generally, the interviewees wanted tougher sanctions, or at least their consistent implementation.<sup>73</sup> They criticized the fact that no asset freezes have been applied, and that envisaged travel bans have not been enforced, enabling regime agitators to travel freely and indoctrinate the diaspora youth through the YPPDJ.<sup>74</sup>

When the first report of the Monitoring Group revealed the extortion of taxes from diaspora communities, several opposition groups started to lobby their host governments to take action.<sup>75</sup> The extended sanctions regime of December 2011 was a direct response to these developments. In a resolution of 18 July 2011, the UN resolved that it:

*Condemns* the use of the “Diaspora tax” on Eritrean diaspora by the Eritrean government to destabilize the Horn of Africa region ... and *decides* that Eritrea shall cease using extortion, threats of violence, fraud and other illicit means to collect taxes outside Eritrea from its nationals or other individuals of Eritrean descent, *decides* further that States shall undertake appropriate measures to hold accountable ... those individuals on their territory who are acting, officially or unofficially, on behalf of the Eritrean government or the PFDJ.<sup>76</sup>

This resolution provided opposition groups with potential political leverage. Eritreans living in Canada have been particularly successful in using the resolution to lobby their host governments. In June 2013, the Canadian government expelled Eritrea’s consul general in Toronto, following allegations by the Eritrean community that he was raising funds illegally.<sup>77</sup> In Germany, the government had told the Eritrean embassy to stop collecting the tax in July 2011. However, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported in June 2012 that the regime continued to demand, via informal channels, its payment in exchange for services.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the 2 percent tax issue was taken up by

72. *Ibid.*

73. For an article written by an Eritrean scientist who criticizes the imposition of sanctions, see Redie Bereketeab, ‘The morality of the UN Security Council sanctions against Eritrea: Defensibility, political objectives, and consequences’, *African Studies Review* 56, 2 (2013), pp. 145–61.

74. This opinion was expressed by all interviewees, namely Dr Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, Arhe Hamednaca, Meron Estefanos, Dr Mohammed Kheir, and Yared Fisschaye.

75. United Nations, ‘UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea report’ (UN Security Council, S/2011/433, New York, 18 July 2011).

76. United Nations, ‘UN Security Council, Resolution 2023 (2011)’ (UN Security Council, S/RES/2023, New York, 5 December 2011), pp. 3–4.

77. *CTV News*, ‘Canada taking steps to expel Eritrean diplomat, Baird says’, 4 June 2013, <<http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/canada-taking-steps-to-expel-eritrean-diplomat-baird-says-1.1301769>> (10 June 2013).

78. *Harmnet.org* (official EPDP website), ‘Germany’s *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper blasts Asmara regime on 2% Tax on Eritreans’, 29 June 2012, <[http://www.harmnet.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3896:germanys-sueddeutsche-zeitung-newspaper-blasts-asmara-regime-on-2-tax-on-eritreans&catid=40:english-articles&Itemid=119](http://www.harmnet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3896:germanys-sueddeutsche-zeitung-newspaper-blasts-asmara-regime-on-2-tax-on-eritreans&catid=40:english-articles&Itemid=119)> (10 June 2013).

several newspapers in the Netherlands<sup>79</sup> and in Switzerland,<sup>80</sup> albeit without much success. In Sweden, a draft law to prohibit the tax failed because the government wanted to maintain a dialogue with the regime, which has been holding an Eritrean journalist with Swedish nationality in captivity for 13 years.<sup>81</sup> All in all, the various fragmented opposition groups have been unable to lobby successfully for the implementation of the sanctions resolutions.

On the other side, the opposition youth groups have gained confidence and have been challenging government supporters, who are on the retreat in the public spaces that they used to control by spreading fear and mistrust through their network of informants.<sup>82</sup> As Yared Fisshaye, opposition activist and co-founder of the Eritrean Youth Movement for Change Oslo, explained: 'The effects of the sanctions on the diaspora are remarkable: before the sanctions, lots of people were participating in the fundraising parties of the government, but now, when they rent a hall for 1,000 persons, only 200 show up.'<sup>83</sup>

An increasing number of diaspora Eritreans 'is now less willing to pay the 2 percent tax and money for the PFDJ's fundraising campaigns, and many are keeping a low profile and staying out of politics'.<sup>84</sup> The PFDJ regime does not publish an annual state budget and does not reveal the income it receives from the diaspora tax. However, there have been indirect indicators of a decline of tax flows in recent years. The Eritrean government depends on fuel imports to produce electricity, and since 2010 blackouts have become increasingly frequent. Starting from 2013, the shortage of electricity has led to a severe lack of drinking water in Asmara because pumps are not working. Even the work of the National Security Authority is now being hampered. When a riot occurred in October 2013 in reaction to a military round-up in Asmara, the security officer in charge reported that radio batteries could not be charged during an electricity outage, and his units were unable to ask for additional forces.<sup>85</sup> Given the fact that the mining of gold and other precious metals commenced in 2011 and has since provided the

79. *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, "'Close Eritrean consulate,'" says Dutch-Eritrean journalist', 16 August 2012, <[www.rnw.nl/africa/article/'close-eritrean-consulate'-says-such-eritrean-journalist](http://www.rnw.nl/africa/article/'close-eritrean-consulate'-says-such-eritrean-journalist)> (12 June 2013).

80. See, for instance, *Tagesanzeiger*, 'Bericht: Eritrea treibt in der Schweiz Schutzgelder ein', 31 January 2012.

81. Interview, Arhe Hamednaca, Stockholm, 29 April 2013.

82. The intimidation of the Eritrean diaspora communities by government supporters was mentioned as an important point in interviews with Arhe Hamednaca, Dr Mohammed Kheir, and Yared Fisshaye.

83. Interview, Yared Fisshaye, Oslo, 13 April 2013.

84. Interview, Dr Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, Oslo, 1 April 2013.

85. Gedab News, 'National security team discusses TPDM Role in roundup', 5 November 2013, <[www.awate.com/national-security-team-discusses-epdm-role-in-roundup/](http://www.awate.com/national-security-team-discusses-epdm-role-in-roundup/)> (5 November 2013).

government with an additional income of more than US\$548 million in tax paid by Nevsun Resources, the fall in diaspora tax income must be extensive.<sup>86</sup> Otherwise, the government would have been able to import at least the most basic necessities.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, the government has used different methods – both carrot and stick – to access additional diaspora funds. It held two investment conferences in 2012 in order to attract capital from the diaspora, and it lifted its tough restrictions on the import of foreign currency in 2013.<sup>88</sup> Refugees who escaped national service and are in need of embassy services are made to sign a ‘letter of regret’, which includes the obligation to start paying the 2 percent tax immediately.

The Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group also raised the prospect that the Eritrean mining sector could be used to finance the destabilization of the Horn of Africa region via support for insurgency groups. The Monitoring Group urged UN member states to make sure that institutions under their jurisdiction do not facilitate Eritrean activities in this regard.<sup>89</sup> Currently, only the Canadian Nevsun Mining Corporation is running an operational mine in the country. Nevsun has been criticized for making use of the forced labour that is provided by national service conscripts,<sup>90</sup> but no further measures against the company have been taken so far. However, the government’s opponents hope that increasing awareness of the Eritrean regime’s opaque character and the political and economic risks associated with investing in the country will deter Western companies from engaging in any new investments there.<sup>91</sup>

One more side-effect of the sanctions that appears to have been triggered by the Monitoring Group’s scrutiny, and possibly also by the lobbying activities of the opposition camp, was the appointment of a Special Rapporteur by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Rapporteur subsequently released several devastating reports concerning the human

86. Nevsun Resources Ltd., ‘Positive directions: 2013 Corporate Social Responsibility report’, 2013, <<http://www.nevsun.com/pdf/NevsunCSR-2013-digital.pdf>> (3 September 2013), p. 21.

87. The African Economic Outlook 2013 attributes the sharp contraction (to 5.5 percent) in Eritrea’s GDP growth in 2012 to declining production at the Bisha mine and a fall in remittances from diaspora Eritreans; see <<http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/east-africa/eritrea/>> (20 May 2014).

88. Tesfa News, ‘Eritrea investment conference’, 4 September 2012, <<http://www.tesfanews.net/eritrea-investment-conference/>> (4 September 2012). Tesfa News, ‘Eritrea adopts liberalization of foreign currency’, <<http://www.tesfanews.net/eritrea-adopts-liberalization-of-foreign-currency/>> (21 February 2013).

89. ‘UN Security Council, Resolution 2023 (2011)’, (UN Security Council, S/RES/2023, New York, 5 December 2011), p. 4.

90. Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2013, ‘Hear no evil: Forced labor and corporate responsibility in Eritrea’s mining sector’, January 2013, <<http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea01134Upload.pdf>> (2 February 2013).

91. Interview, Meron Estefanos, Stockholm, 29 April 2013.

rights situation in Eritrea,<sup>92</sup> which led to the establishment of a UN Mission of Inquiry to further investigate the matter.<sup>93</sup>

Although the opposition camp has so far failed to organize joint and comprehensive actions as a response to the sanctions regime, increased confidence among government opponents can be observed. Their activities are now backed by United Nations condemnation of the regime's activities in breach of international law, undermining the sense of moral obligation in the diaspora to pay the 2 percent tax.

*Conclusion: will sanctions facilitate regime change?*

Both the Eritrean regime and the state are experiencing a decline due to the personalization of power under the president and the dismantling of the PFDJ; failed economic policies; the excessive militarization of the society; and the unlimited national service, which has triggered a mass exodus. The Eritrean regime has long lost support inside the country, forcing it to focus on the political and financial support of the Eritrean diaspora. While the UN sanctions do not aim at regime change, they have affected the stability of the regime indirectly through their effects on the views and behaviour of the diaspora.

One component of the sanctions regime was to prevent the Eritrean government from coercing the diaspora into paying the 2 percent tax. Although the embassies and other government agents keep collecting the levy through both formal and informal channels, a side effect of the sanctions was to provoke a change in diaspora behaviour. The reports of the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group raised awareness among the international community and the diaspora regarding the regime's military adventures and illegal activities. This increased awareness has sapped the willingness of many Eritreans to continue paying the 2 percent tax. In addition, the 2011 sanctions resolution provided regime opponents with a reason to lobby their host governments to prohibit levying the tax. However, due to its lack of cohesion, the opposition's success in capitalizing on the sanctions regime has until now been limited, and a considerable number of diaspora Eritreans continue to pay the tax – partly out of the conviction that they are supporting a “noble cause”, and partly as a result of coercion.

92. UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea' (UN Document A/HRC/23/53, New York, 28 May 2013 and UN Document A/HRC/26/45, New York, 13 May 2014).

93. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Human Rights Council creates mandate on persons with disabilities and establishes Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea', <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14794&LangID=E>> (27 June 2014).

The sanctions have had a dual effect at the transnational level. On the one hand, they have created a “rally around the flag” effect with increased fundraising activities on the part of staunch PFDJ supporters, especially in the immediate aftermath of their imposition. On the other hand, they have attributed additional legitimacy to the emergent anti-government youth movements, but they also brought to light the opposition’s lack of capacity to significantly profit from this opportunity. In the words of human rights activist Meron Estefanos, ‘the leaders of the opposition parties have been in power as long as Isaias or even longer, so what makes the difference? Isaias is not the only problem; it is also the state of the opposition.’<sup>94</sup>

The sanctions are one of a number of different factors, most of them home-grown, that are contributing to diminishing political support for the regime in the diaspora. For many years the government has capitalized on the diaspora’s long-distance nationalism and its willingness to make financial sacrifices for the nation as a political survival strategy to avoid overdue internal reforms. Yet it seems that sanctions have contributed to creating awareness among Eritreans abroad, and that this strategy is gradually reaching its limits.

94. Interview, Meron Estefanos.