

The Trap of Revisionist Logic: Why Eritrean Sovereignty Was Never "In Question"¹

Dr. Gebre Gebremariam

In the wake of heightened Ethiopian rhetoric concerning the Red Sea and historical territorial "rights," a specific question has recently begun circulating in digital forums and discussion groups: *"When was the sovereignty of Eritrea violated?"* While this question might appear to be an invitation for historical analysis, it is, in fact, a fundamental distraction. Worse yet, many Eritreans, in an attempt to be analytical, are inadvertently falling into a trap laid by Ethiopian revanchists.



By focusing on 1993 as a moment of "ambiguity" or "unclear demarcation," some commentators are validating a narrative that seeks to undermine the legitimacy of the Eritrean state. It is time to set the facts straight. The sovereignty of Eritrea was not a "gift" of 1993, nor was it a "violation" of any legal norm – it was the restoration of a defined legal entity.

¹ For more in-depth analysis and documentation on these issues, visit www.EritreaHageray.com

The Legal Bedrock: 1900, 1902, and 1908

The borders of Eritrea were not a modern invention of the EPLF or the TPLF or any other modern force or group for that matter. They were established by three specific, internationally recognized treaties between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ethiopian Empire:

- I. **The Treaty of 1900 (July 10)** – Established the **Central Sector**. It defined the boundary along the line of the **Mareb-Belesa-Muna** rivers. This treaty set the highland boundaries that have existed for over 125 years. (Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission 2002, 10).



- II. **The Treaty of 1902 (May 15)** – A tripartite agreement between Italy, Ethiopia, and Great Britain (for Sudan). It established the **Western Sector**, defining the border from the Setit river to the junction of the Mareb and Mai Ambessa. It specifically ensured the Kunama people remained within Eritrean territory (United Nations 1902).
- III. **The Treaty of 1908 (May 16)** – Established the **Eastern Sector**. It defined the boundary in the Afar region as a line running **parallel to the coast at a distance of 60 kilometers**, extending to the border of French Somaliland (modern-day Djibouti). (Hertslet 1909, 1223).

When the Eritrean people voted in the 1993 referendum, they were voting for independence within these specific, pre-existing colonial boundaries. There was no "confusion" about the borders in 1993 because the legal definition of "Italian Eritrea" had been static for nearly a century. To claim that sovereignty was "violated" or "unclear" because the ground was not physically marked with beacons is to fundamentally misunderstand international law. Under the principle of *uti possidetis juris* – a principle adopted by the Organization of African Unity in 1964 – the colonial borders of a territory are its sovereign borders upon independence (Shaw 2021, 380).

The Trap of the "Wrong Question": A Lesson for Eritreans

There is a growing trend where some Eritreans attempt to answer the question of "violated sovereignty" by criticizing the 1993 process. This is a dangerous intellectual error.

By entertaining the idea that the 1993 borders were "uncertain," one inadvertently supports the current revanchist narrative from Addis Ababa. The revanchist logic argues that because the 1993 referendum was "rushed" or "the borders weren't clear," the entire independence of Eritrea is a "historical mistake" that can be corrected.

If you agree that the question is "When was sovereignty violated?" and you point to 1993, you are essentially saying that the referendum itself was the violation. This is the exact argument used by expansionists. The truth is: **Eritrean sovereignty was violated in 1962** (by the Ethiopian annexation) and **restored in 1993**. Any Eritrean participating in discussions that frame the 1993 border as "unclear" is handing a psychological victory to those who wish to reclaim the Red Sea coast.

1998 versus Modern Revanchism

We must also distinguish between the 1998 – 2000 border war and the current political atmosphere. The 1998 conflict, while devastating, was a **border dispute**. It involved claims and counterclaims over specific coordinates, such as Badme, based on differing interpretations of the 1902 treaty. Both parties, at that time, acknowledged the existence of the border; they simply disagreed on its exact placement.

What we are seeing today under the administration of Abiy Ahmed is not a border dispute; it is **revanchism**. Revanchism is a policy of seeking to recover "lost" territory based on nationalist sentiment rather than law (Kopp 2001). We see historical parallels in the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, where Iraq claimed Kuwait was "historically" part of its territory, ignoring the clear legal boundaries established by earlier treaties. Like Iraq's failed claim, the current Ethiopian suggestion that Eritrea's sovereignty is "up for discussion" is a direct assault on the UN Charter.

Conclusion: The Finality of the Law

The question "When was the sovereignty of Eritrea violated?" is a red herring. The sovereignty of Eritrea is a settled legal fact, reaffirmed by the 2002 Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). The Commission used the 1900, 1902, and 1908 treaties as the *sole* basis for its decision, proving that those treaties remained the only valid legal instruments (EEBC 2002).



Eritreans must be vigilant. Do not let revisionist narratives refashion our history as a series of "mistakes." Our borders are defined by blood and by law. The 1993 referendum did not violate sovereignty – it fulfilled it. Any attempt to "re-examine" this process is not an intellectual exercise; it is an act of aggression.

References

Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). 2002. *Decision Regarding Delimitation of the Border between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. The Hague: Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Hertslet, Edward. 1909. *The Map of Africa by Treaty*. 3rd ed. Vol. 3. London: Harrison and Sons.

Kopp, Hans. 2001. *The Etymology of Revanchism*. New York: Academic Press.

Shaw, Malcolm N. 2021. *International Law*. 9th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United Nations. 1902. *Treaty between Ethiopia, Italy, and the United Kingdom (Sudan boundary)*. Signed May 15, 1902. UN Treaty Series. [UN Treaty Series / Ethio-Italian 1900](#).

Relevant Sources Regarding Maps:

The 1902 Boundary Map: You can find the original Annex to the 1902 Treaty (often referred to as the "Map of the Western Sector") in the British National Archives or via the. [Geospatial Information for United Nations](#)

The EEBC Map (2002): This is the most crucial map for any user. It shows the "Delimitation Line" as determined by international law, explicitly citing the 1900, 1902, and 1908 treaties. It can be accessed through the [Permanent Court of Arbitration website](#).