

## **From resistance to governance How the EPLF/PFDJ experience shapes Eritrea's regional strategy**

By Dan Connell

Power in Eritrea is exercised through layers that are increasingly opaque as one approaches the center, like a set of Russian *matryoshka* dolls, nesting one inside the other. An exploration of this phenomenon as it developed within the circle that now rules Eritrea sheds light on the way the country's "acting" but unelected president, former guerrilla commander Isaias Afwerki, governs today and how he and his circle seek to extend Eritrea's influence across the Horn of Africa using small, disciplined "cores" to manipulate larger, more loosely organized bodies to secure political ends. I argue that organization, not ideology, is the governing principle and short-term advantage the determining value in the country's seemingly erratic regional relations. I argue further that Eritrea's belligerent behavior in the region is guided by a force-multiplication strategy derived from its experience in the protracted liberation war and that the new country is itself structured more like a guerrilla base area than a modern state.

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