

Threat Profile - Eriyan National Liberation Front (ENLF)

Background and Overview

The ENLF was originally the North Eri branch of the Eriyan National Liberation Front (ENLF), which was formed to protect the Eastarian population from Dotan oppression in the period immediately after Garland independence in 1983. The Dotan-majority government at that time was concerned that regional neighbours would attempt to destabilize the fledgling state by stoking ethnic tension, leading to the deployment of the Garyan Armed Forces (GAF) to border areas. It is worth noting that in 1983, the GAF had not made the transition from rebel force to the professional military arm of Garland and, as such, ill-discipline, looting, sexual exploitation, and extra judicial killing was relatively common.

This led to the defection of Eastarian NCOs (Eastarians still comprise the backbone of the GAF non-commissioned ranks) from the GAF, and to the formation of loosely connected self-defence groups, with each group focused on the defence of its immediate environs. This is one of the few para-military organizations in the region with mixed gender cadres of males and females, and it is believed that this has resulted in fewer incidents of conflict-related sexual violence attributed to the group.

Over time, the ENLF became more powerful, benefitting greatly from the Garland invasion of Eastland in 1988. The invasion prompted Eastland to channel money, weapons, and experienced soldiers to the ENLF, which was then expected to attack GAF land lines of communications to Eastland. The ENLF readily complied and used its superior knowledge of the local terrain to great effect, eventually forcing the GAF to route supplies overland through North East province, or along the Nicada-Qanabi axis, the only road the government retained control of throughout the war.

During this period, the ENLF was primarily a guerrilla force, attacking the GAF in section to platoon-sized groups, using the local population to acquire information on targets. Typically, an ENLF operation involved the use of locals as reconnaissance elements and spotters, before a highly mobile ENLF platoon would attack small, isolated GAF bases and/or convoys using direct and indirect fire weapons. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the ENLF avoided large-scale conventional engagements; both Sparrow and Le Pew were heavily influenced by the writings of Sun Tzu and understand that they are cannot compete with the GAF's conventional firepower.

After the Garland-Eastland war ended, the ENLF divided into two groups, each led by charismatic commanders that emerged between 1988 and 1990. Joseph le Pew controlled all ENLF forces to the north of the Nicada-Qanabi axis, while John Sparrow controlled all ENLF forces to its south. At that time, this arrangement made sense from a command and control perspective and was not caused by ideological differences. However, over time, the two groups developed different perspectives and objectives. This led to a definitive split between the groups in 1995, with the northern ENLF retaining the ENLF name, and with the southern ENLF becoming the Eriyan Independence Movement Fighters (EIMF).

The catalyst to the split was linked to the control of resources. While both South and North Eri have relatively abundant mineral resources, South Eri had the more valuable mines and better lines of communications with Eastland. This meant that the ENLF southern sector became the wealthier group, developed stronger connections with regional businessmen, and was generally considered to be more politically astute. In 1993, John Sparrow set the tone for his southern sector when he unilaterally announced – apparently without coordinating with Joseph le Pew – that the ENLF sought to create an independent state, harnessing its natural resources and trading with regional partners, including Garland. This angered Joseph Le Pew, who favoured secession from Garland to join with Eastland. Despite talks aimed at bridging the significant political divide between the two, John Sparrow announced the formation of the EIMF in June 1995. The split was bloodless, though John Sparrow was known to have been frustrated at having to grant control of the Nicada-Qanabi axis to the ENLF. This

critical road is the ENLF's economic lifeline, allowing the group to manage large-scale illicit trade with Eastland, to raise taxes, and to use as leverage with the Government of Garland.

From 1995 to 2012, the ENLF maintained relatively good relations with the EIMF, but occasionally the groups clashed at the tactical level, particularly in areas close to the border with Eastland, which both need to control in order to engage in illicit trade. The ENLF also continued to engage in low-level clashes with the GAF during this period, but restricted its operations to denying GAF Freedom of Movement (FOM). This also allowed the ENLF to consolidate its hold on the countryside and meant that GAF units only patrolled in and around the urban areas of Nicada, Qanabi, and the northern section of Walesi, and along the major roads connecting them. The GAF also maintained a platoon-sized outpost at Dahari during this period. However, this outpost was overrun on two occasions, prompting the GAF to reinforce to a Mechanised Infantry Company, which remains there to this day.

There are multiple reports, including many from the 7th Continent Force, which maintained an OP at Dahari, that the ENLF had de-facto control of the border crossing point NE of Dahari, and that the local GAF commander was paid not to move his forces to that location.

Along with the EIMF, the ENLF also joined the mutinying ethnic Eastarian officers during the 2012 coup. However, unlike the EIMF, the ENLF never engaged the GAF in a conventional manner, preferring to engage in hit and run guerrilla tactics, which confined the GAF to urban areas.

The 2015 ceasefire between the EIMF and the GAF was a negative development for the ENLF. This allowed the GAF to concentrate its forces on North Eri, resulting in the ENLF losing control of some of its traditional zones of control. This undermined the ENLF's revenue-raising capability as the GAF had the capacity to move in Company to Battalion-sized convoys along the main supply routes in North Eri, more effectively securing them, ensuring that the ENLF was not able to extort money from local traders and/or humanitarian actors. The weakening of the ENLF relative to the EIMF also saw Eastland favour the EIMF, despite the EIMF not wanting to join with Eastland. It took the group until late 2017 until it regained control of the areas it had lost during that period, and it remains unclear whether it has the capability to maintain control over its valuable border crossing points, with pressure coming from the GAF, independent smugglers, and the EIMF, which is encroaching on traditional areas of ENLF control from South Eri.

The ENLF initially welcomed the 7th Continent Force and the UN deployment, but it has consistently messaged that any group or entity seeking to undermine its ability to control areas it dominated would face resistance. Indeed, on occasions when the 7th CF moved into border areas, even for short period of time, it faced multiple challenges, including the use of the local population to deny it FOM, and the use of mines to disrupt movement in isolated areas. On one occasion, a 7th CF drone was fired on from the Dahari border crossing point area. These incidents notwithstanding, the humanitarian ceasefire has largely held, and the incidence of clashes between the ENLF and the GAF has reduced considerably.

Recent and Significant Activity

Throughout 2018, the ENLF installed checkpoints on almost all routes in North Eri to extort money from humanitarian actors. The 7th CF and UN patrols have noted the existence of these checkpoints, but because the individuals manning them never appeared to have weapons, nothing could be done about them.

Throughout 2018, humanitarian actors report an increase in the appearance of armed men in the IDP camps in North Eri, particularly in Dafari IDP camp. Local sources indicate that these individuals are attempting to recruit at-risk youth. Local sources also report, but NGOs cannot confirm, the rape of women at some of these camps.

Through the summer of 2018, there has been an increase in the strength of ENLF cadres in and around Dafari, and the BXP to its north.

There have been several low-level breaches of the humanitarian ceasefire. These incidents have occurred at a rate of approximately once per month since Jan 2018, typically occurring when the GAF has attempted to move in force north east of Nicada. GAF patrols north of Dafari have also had warning

shots fired at them. However, the ceasefire is generally considered to be holding, which greatly pleases the local population.

In Sep 2018, a UNMIG patrol was denied access to the local IDP camp by a group of unarmed civilians. This incident followed two others where UN patrols were forced to halt on secondary roads leading to the border crossing point by locals, professing to be angry about the damage UN vehicles were doing to their roads.

Group Profile

The ENLF currently controls illicit trade to Eastland from North Eri, but faces challenges to its authority on several fronts, most notably from the EIMF, which has emerged as a more powerful group due to canny political decision making. The group also taxes agricultural produce, local markets, and controls the movement of goods to more remote areas of North Eri. It is also understood that it extorts foreign mining interests, which pays the group protection money; the ENLF asserts effective control over two cobalt mines, located in the north of the province and is reportedly paid to provide protection to gold and tantalum mines in and around Dafari. All told, GAF intelligence sources indicate that the group earns approximately 100,000 to 200,000 USD per month, which is sufficient to pay its soldiers (estimated to number about 3000) a living wage of approximately 150 USD per month. The group's financial constraints and its status as an active combatant group means that it cannot always attract personnel to its ranks. This has led to the forced recruitment of military aged males from IDP camps; the IDP camps are populated by Eastarians who are fleeing from areas of frequent GAF-ENLF combat operations, typically from rural villages on approach routes to mines and ENLF concentration areas. The IDP camps are preferred recruiting grounds as this does not interfere with agricultural production in North Eri. However, it does undermine ENLF popularity in the IDP camps.

ENLF bases are reported to be in the difficult terrain north of the Nicada – Qanabi – Dafari axis. These areas also act as their training areas. The group remains strong enough to control most secondary routes in North Eri, with the exception of the Nicada to Dafari axis, which is regularly patrolled by the GAF. However, even this route is not believed to be free of ENLF influence by night and it is well understood that the ENLF has the capability to close the route, particularly to the north of Qanabi where its influence is strongest (the difficult ground north of Qanabi is a known ENLF consolidation area).

The ENLF has contact with local GAF commanders and there are rumours that the group pays these commanders not to enter certain ENLF strongholds. The ENLF has a back channel to the government of Eastland and to the government of Garland, but neither of these governments consider the ENLF to be a viable partner going forward. Indeed, the GAF and the ENLF remain in a state of war, with no ceasefire of any kind in place. The GAF still maintains a Battalion-sized presence in Nicada and company-sized bases in both Qanabi and Dahari. The GAF also irregularly patrols the MSRs throughout North Eri, but generally confines itself to urban areas.

The ENLF approach continues to be limited to guerilla raids on isolated GAF bases, and ambushes of GAF convoys. It generally permits humanitarian actors to do their work but extorts money and goods from them at food/service delivery points. To date, the ENLF has tolerated the presence of international forces throughout North Eri, on the understanding that these forces do not interfere with its ability to recruit, raise money, and operate.

The group has an exceptional ability to operate over terrain denied to conventional forces, moving easily across forests and bodies of water, and is capable of self-sustaining in all types of terrain. The group has sympathizers throughout North Eri, but does not have the full support of all elements of the Eastarian community, many of whom just want to live a peaceful life. Moreover, the Dotan consider the ENLF to be an existential threat and only move outside of urban areas with an Eastarian friend or with the support and protection of the GAF.

The local IDP population does not always consider that the group acts in their best interests. To his credit, Joseph Le Pew understands that his group will not survive without local support, and he is using a social media messaging campaign to reach the local community. Under his guidance, the ENLF has also started outreach programs to local community leaders, and has punished some of its local

commanders who have overstepped in their mistreatment of the local population. The ENLF also uses a free pamphlet, which appears twice per month to keep the local population informed of its activities and objectives.

The ENLF has links to the Anti-Western fighters, but only because it trades with the latter. The two groups do not have a shared ideological platform, and the ENLF has never used suicide bombers. However, the group does have some asymmetric capabilities and has been known to use command wire detonated IEDs during ambushes. The group has also used VBIEDs to initiate larger attacks, but has never employed an SVBIED.

Generally, the ENLF operates at something between section and platoon-minus strength, although on two occasions in 2012 the group launched a company-sized attack. However, observers noted that this attack was poorly coordinated, and it sustained heavy losses. It is worth noting that heavy losses do not impact the ENLF's motivation. Indeed, its soldiers are secessionist zealots, most of whom are willing to die for their cause ('to join with their Eastland brothers'). It is important to note that the ENLF has historically recruited widely among the female population of North Eri, finding that they are adept planners, and intelligence operatives. However, female cadres have also been seen at the frontline, often used in ambushes against the GAF, which is often surprised to see women in frontline roles.

The group communicates using mobile phone between HQ locations, and HF radio to reach more remote locations. The group is also set up to use runners, the local population, mobile phone (WhatsApp), social media, and radio during unconventional operations.

The group's soldiers are armed with AK 47s and grenades, and each section of men carries two RPG-7 launchers. Each platoon-sized body of men has an indirect fire capability (60mm Mortars), and there is evidence that it retains an 81mm Mortar capability, which is sometimes deployed with a platoon-sized group. Each section of men moves on a Technical Vehicle (typically a soft skinned Toyota Hilux), some of which has a HMG mounted. The group has no armour, and a limited number of BMP-type APCs. The group has no functioning artillery capability.

The ENLF has used both anti-tank mines and anti-personnel mines to defend against GAF incursions.

The group has an anti-tank capability, but it is limited to RPGs and recoilless rifles.

The ENLF has no known anti-air capability, but has used RPGs, HMGs and other direct fire weapons to engage GAF helicopters in the past.