

Threat Profile - Eriyan Independence Movement Front (EIMF)

Background and Overview

The EIMF was originally the South 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.

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 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.

At the time, John Sparrow felt the loss of that road – and its border crossing point – was justified, considering that it meant a bloodless division of the ENLF.

Throughout the 1990s and until 2012, the EIMF continued to resist GAF encroachment into both North and South Eri, preventing the extension of Garland state authority beyond the main urban centres, and maintaining de-facto local control of security for mining concessions. This led to a live and let live dynamic between local GAF units and the EIMF, which was careful to share some of the spoils with local GAF commanders and Dotan politicians; it is worth noting that these GAF commanders and politicians also benefitted financially from the central government by raising ‘ghost units’ of Eastarian locals, and claiming their pay. On occasion, the central Garland government ordered crackdowns against the EIMF, during which times the group retreated into the mountains and forests, emerging at night to attack GAF units.

Over time, EIMF control of the mines and of the border with Eastland allowed it to procure more advanced weapons and communications systems, better training for its personnel and, despite its unwillingness to join Eastland, strong links with Eastland officials, who by 2012 could see that the international community would not countenance its annexation of either South or North Eri.

However, this relative calm was shattered by the 2012 coup. The coup was planned and executed by the Eastarian NCOs and aimed to topple the Government of Garland. At that time, both the ENLF and the EIMF saw this as an opportunity to realise their respective political ambitions and joined the mutinying GAF personnel. The coup was quickly put down and, after a period of GAF consolidation, it was deployed to both North and South Eri to defeat the ENLF and the EIMF on the battlefield. From 2012 to 2015, the GAF reasserted control of all key urban areas and lines of communications, ceding the forests and hills to the ENLF and EIMF rebels.

In 2012, the EIMF attempted to meet the GAF on the conventional battlefield, but suffered heavy losses, despite some successes at Company level. The GAF was able to quickly reinforce and replace its losses, but the EIMF suffered as it did not have a cadre of trained personnel to take the place of those lost. As a result, from 2013, the EIMF moved to the hills and forests, from which they engaged the GAF, disrupting their logistics route, and restricting its areas of influence to the major towns. Essentially, the conflict was in a mutually hurting stalemate from about mid-2014 through to the ceasefire.

It was at this time that John Sparrow realised that it was in his interests to come to a settlement with the government of Garland, lest the ENLF manage to do it first. The government of Garland, with its foreign currency reserves dwindling, largely as a result of reduced economic activity in the Eris, was also keen to do business. The subsequent Garland – EIMF ceasefire agreement worked for both sides. The GAF agreed to vacate all of South Eri, and to a revenue sharing agreement for the mines in the area. It was also agreed that the EIMF would have control of border crossing points between South Eri and Eastland, with taxes and tariffs collected being split between the Government and the EIMF. Once again, the EIMF was in position to re-arm and strengthen.

Since 2015, the EIMF has been pushing north towards the NICADIA – QANABI axis, and some commentators suggest that it is only a matter of time before the group attempts to take control of North Eri to increase its leverage with both Eastland and Garland. Indeed, John Sparrow reportedly believes that if he controls all eastern Garland, the EIMF may be granted even greater autonomy. However, it is important to note that the ENLF remains a viable force in North Eri and that the GAF would also be expected to resist further EIMF expansion.

Reluctant to cede control of the Eris to the EIMF, the Government of Garland has asked that the UN launch a DDR program in South Eri. The EIMF has stated that it will not engage in any DDR program until it is granted full autonomy in areas that it controls. The EIMF has also stated that because South Eri is under its full control, and because it is not a party to the SOFA between UNHQ and Garland, it will not countenance the presence of the UN in its AOR. The EIMF had the same attitude to the 7th Continent Force, which was reduced to sending SOF patrols into the area for reconnaissance purposes only.

Recent and Significant Activity

Between January and March of 2018, the 7th Continent Force reports indicate that EIMF patrols, up to platoon sized, were frequently operating along the northern reaches of the Walesi – Nicada axis. Source reported to the 7th CF that these movements were facilitated by the GAF; the 7th CF assessment was that the GAF would prefer to see the EIMF move into ENLF-controlled territory in order to defeat the ‘near enemy’.

In April 2018, local sources reporting to the 7th CF indicate that the EIMF had sent special forces units into the area surrounding Dafari, NFDK.

In June 2018, there was a stand-off between EIMF and ENLF units on the Qanabi-Dafari axis. The stand-off took place late at night, and was only resolved thanks to a personal phone call made from a high-level EIMF commander to the Joseph Le Pew, who happened to be an old comrade in arms; the EIMF commander apologised for the incursion into ENLF territory, claiming it was a navigation error by a junior officer.

Throughout summer 2018, locals report seeing small groups of EIMF personnel operating north of Dafari. The areas mentioned in reporting were IVO the gold mine, and IVO the border crossing point into Eastland.

From June to Sep 2018, the UN reports seeing an increasing number of ENLF patrols at irregular hours along the Nicada – Dafari axis, and a strengthening of their border crossing and gold mine point guards.

Group Profile

The EIMF generates significant funds from the provision of security services at mines (Cobalt, Tantalum, Gold and Nickel) dotted across South Eri. Security is provided on site, and for the transport of the minerals to state capital. The group is also believed to siphon off some resources for transportation to Eastland via the Byra border crossing point. These activities directly support the payment of approximately 500 of its 2-3000 soldiers, and indirectly supports the local economy. The revenues that the group accrues for the illicit movement of minerals to Eastland total approximately 500,000 USD per month and facilitates the payment of the rest of its soldiers, their training, and the procurement of new arms and munitions.

Considering South Eri has no Garland state presence, the EIMF also deploys its soldiers (approximately 10 in each major urban area) in a paramilitary role to keep the peace. It is worth noting that female cadres often lead in this paramilitary role, acting as a vital link to the local population. There have been discussions with state-level interlocutors to ascertain whether Garland could provide the EIMF with funds to create a lightly armed police force to maintain security in urban areas. However, it is uncertain this will happen as the Government is concerned that to do so would be to permanently cede control of South Eri to the EIMF. EIMF leadership is concerned that using its soldiers in this role reduces their combat effectiveness and, as a result, only its oldest soldiers, commanded by female officers, are used to provide urban security.

The EIMF has no difficulty recruiting soldiers as a result of its ability to pay a relatively high monthly salary of approximately 200 USD. The group recruits almost exclusively from the local population, but there has been some information (dating from late 2017) that the group is also recruiting from the southern part of North Eri.

In order to maintain its ability to pay its soldiers and to generate revenue through taxes and tariffs, the EIMF maintains good relationships with political figures from both Garland and Eastland, and with local military leaders on both sides of the border. The EIMF’s generally good financial position means that it encourages rather than stifles local economic activity. All this means that the group maintains a high popularity rating with the local population and has good relations with key leaders from all ethnic groups in South Eri. Indeed, the EIMF has a relatively well-developed propaganda arm and broadcasts pro-EIMF/pro-secessionist messaging on FM radio from Byra. The group also publishes a weekly pamphlet, which is handed out free of charge at markets in urban areas.

Despite its guerrilla antecedents, the group has developed a more hierarchical structure, facilitated by the lack of military pressure from the GAF. Accordingly, the group maintains what is roughly recognisable as six Battalion areas of operational responsibility, centred on each major urban area in South Eri. It has one special forces Battalion which is known to operate in and around Walesi. This Battalion comprises of some of its most experienced personnel. This Battalion is tasked with securing the largely undefined region between ENLF and EIMF control. As a result of its good relationship with the GAF and with the Government of Garland, the EIMF uses a central training area, located north of Turus; this area, comprising a mixture of wetland, forests, and hills is considered ideal for inexperienced troops. More advanced SOF training takes place in the difficult terrain north of Byra.

Generally, the EIMF trains to fight at Company level, incorporating indirect fire (to 81mm Mortar level) and heavy machine guns. However, John Sparrow, recognising the possibility of future GAF operations in South Eri, has insisted that all personnel be trained to operate independently at section to platoon-level in an unconventional manner. It is understood that the group holds an annual exercise simulating a large-scale GAF invasion, overrunning its bases and disrupting its C2 structures. Whilst using its conventional structure the group communicates using e-mail and mobile phone between HQ locations, fixed line communications in and around urban areas and its mining interests, 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.

To date, there have been no recorded incidents of the EIMF using suicide bombers on operations, despite unsubstantiated rumours of links to the Anti-Western Fighters, but it is understood that it has the capability to remotely detonate mines using radio and command wires.

The group's normal soldiers are armed with AK 47s and grenades, and each section of men carries two RPG-7 launchers. Each platoon has an indirect fire capability (60mm Mortars), and at company level there is an 81mm Mortar team. Each section of men moves on a Technical Vehicle (typically a soft skinned Toyota Hilux), and each platoon as at least one Hilux that has a HMG mounted. The group is known to have a small number (no more than 20) of BMP-1s, which are generally thought to be held in reserve. These vehicles and a small number (no more than 10) of T54-55 MBTs were captured from GAF bases in 2012. The EIMF can operate them, but their state of repair is unknown. It is also believed that their combat utility is questionable in the heavily forested terrain of South Eri. The EIMF has a well-developed indirect fire capability, primarily from light and medium mortars, but is also known to have captured at least 10 2S1 self-propelled artillery systems from the GAF. Once again, little is known about their state of repair, or of the group's ability to maintain them.

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

The group has an anti-tank capability and photos taken from social media indicate that it now has access to Javelin ATGMs, probably supplied by Eastland, and recoilless rifles. However, the Javelin has never been used in EIMF operations.

The EIMF has no known anti-air capability, but has used RPGs, HMGs and their limited stock of ZSU-234 to engage GAF helicopters in the past.