

Eritrea's Isaias Afwerki: a tactical authoritarian who might be president for life

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Thursday, 29 October 2020 08:03 -



There are few leaders as enigmatic as Eritrea's president, Isaias Afwerki.

In [my book](#), *Understanding Eritrea: Inside Africa's Most Repressive State*, I profile the president who led the country as it fought for its freedom from Ethiopia for 30 years, only to then turn on his own people.

Eritrea has been independent since 1993 but has no constitution and no parliament. No budget has ever been published. Elections have never been held and Isaias's opponents languish in jail.

The president is a brooding, taciturn figure, who has dominated Eritrean politics since the 1970s.

[Isaias](#) was born in the Aba Shi'aul district of the Eritrean capital, Asmara, in February 1942. The son of an employee of the state tobacco company, he attended the Prince Makonnen Secondary School. At the time Eritrea was an integral part of Ethiopia.

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