

Save me from the kindness of my friends. By Yilma Bekele

We all have a few issues. Some are real while a few are due to ignorance but somewhere in between there are some topics raised by some folks that stops you on your track. All one can do is stand back, raise an eyebrow, take a breath and exclaim 'what is that all about?'

That was exactly my reaction after listening to a discussion about the liberation of my country. It seems to me we have developed this nasty habit of choosing who can free us from serfdom even before the real job starts. The theoretical discussion have some folks getting twisted out of shape making one wonder what would happen when we actually have a few liberated territories to administer.

The interview was bundled into a two hour forty four minutes and thirty two seconds audio clip distributed by our friends from Ethiomedia. It was titled Eritrea: A friend or foe for a democratic change in Ethiopia? The question posed is very provocative and adds unnecessary layer to our struggle. If Eritrea is considered to be a foe we will be faced with two fronts to fight in order to be free.

Most Ethiopians are not into making the job harder and heavier. It is considered good policy to make friends with others of the same interest to lighten the load. One front at a time is a good and prudent policy to follow. Some folks just try to make their issue our issue. I have no way of knowing how much editing was done before distribution.

The original program was aired by 'Addis Dimtz Radio from Washington D.C. Calling it a discussion is a little misleading. All three guests held the same opinion and were piling on each other to see who can go out on a limb.

The guests were German-based Leul Qesqis Ethiopian Patriotic Front (Guard), Journalist Senai Gebremedhin of Australia and Journalist Kinfu Assefa of The Netherlands.

The recent interview of President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea by ESAT was what they were assembled to discuss. The host Ato Abebe Belew gave the panelists more than enough time to present one cohesive argument why they were opposed to the idea of accepting Eritrea's generous offer to look the other way while we use their territory.

I watched the interview on ESAT. The Eritrean President presented a very interesting interpretation of history. It is always good to know what others think and how they process information. Most Ethiopians are familiar with President Isaias Afewerki. He is not a loved figure in Ethiopia. His image has been tarnished by over fifty years of propaganda by successive regimes all to their own end and mostly in a futile attempt to save a dying system.

Two have met their demise and the third one is attempting the same feat. May God save us all! Anyway Ato Isaias Afewerki has been viewed mostly as an evil figure. He has been seen as a friend only once for a brief period of time. It is a subject Woyanes' would rather not talk about.

I have grown up listening and reading about him and this is the first time I have sat to closely follow and see how he carries himself. His desk, his cloth, his hat and the beige background all reflected the simplified life he advocated and seems to live. I was most surprised by the absence of a big flag of Eritrea flying in the background engulfing the speaker with naked show of patriotism. I am impressed he did not need such props. It shows modesty as well as confidence.

I enjoyed his fast reply to difficult questions and the cunning way he managed to avoid the ones he did not want to answer. I am grateful to the two Journalists for raising tough questions that need to be asked and steering the conversation in a smart manner

I did not focus much on what he has to say about the past and his opinion of Woyane. I would rather pay attention on what he has to say about the future. I am also aware that as a powerful head of state his views are very important and directly affect our country. What I totally agreed with him is the belief that a non-democratic, ethnically divided Ethiopia to be a hindrance to the development of both countries. The Woyane regime in order to hold on to power incites hatred and intolerance among people and nations of the region. The Woyane regime in Ethiopia is the cause of instability in the Horn of Africa. That fits our description of the current Ethiopian regime.

It is the same regime that deleted Andenet by using their Kangaroo court and that also denied Semayawi Party's participation in the election process by using the Election Board to give it legality. The question becomes what exactly is wrong with Ethiopian Democratic Forces using Eritrean territory to train and prepare to topple this mafia regime? It looks like we have a mutual interest with Eritrea in the resolution of this common discomfort. Anything wrong with that?

Many have tried to operate from Eritrea. Today there are a few combatants from Ethiopia located in Eritrea to organize better. It is now two years since the formation of Ginbot7 Popular Forces that have managed to work in a stealth manner and are fine-tuning their ways make the effort match the prize. The Patriotic Front which is one of the oldest and that has faced many obstacles is still operating from Eritrea. The two organizations that is Patriotic Front and Ginbot7 have agreed to a merger. It is a great leap forward. ESAT got access to be present at such historical event due to the good will of the Eritrean Government.

It indeed is a step forward on our journey to see a free Ethiopia and the fact it was recorded by the number one weapon of our people to be free is a proud moment for us all. It was during this trip ESAT was able to secure an interview with the Eritrean head of state. And it is the news and the interview that precipitated the program by Addis Dimtz Radio.

Our panelists did not discuss the Interview. They did not discuss the historical trip by an Independent Ethiopian broadcaster going to Eritrea and witness the monumental occasion of Ethiopian Forces coming together to face the common enemy. They did not dissect the President's speech and give us a glimpse of his thought regarding our country.

The discussion was solely on the wisdom of cooperating with Eritrea to fight the Warlords in power. The guests were there to explain why they think differently. It would have helped to have assembled folks that have differing views so the listener can hear all sides of the issue.

It is a moot point. No organization has asked for anyone's permission to set up shop in Eritrea or anywhere. It does not work like that. Just because someone tried and failed does not mean there is no different approach that would succeed. With all due respect it is better to sit down and do an in-depth search of why it did not succeed and find a way to help others avoid failure than to be a naysayer without merit..

The panelists were setting up a warning beacon for all others to move with caution based on their failed encounter. I have no problem with that. What I object to is this idea of undermining others that are working to find their own way. Concentrating on one's own effort and making it succeed would earn more points and move the ball.

To come on radio and disparage and question the character of others is not a winning formula. For the host to give people free rein to use the air waves to make unsubstantiated and uninformed statements bordering on slander on our struggle is not fair or a good way to make friends.

After all is said the point I got was that the gentlemen were accusing Shabia for the non-activity of some of the organizations residing in Eritrea. I have no idea why. We do not have enough data to show the strength or weakness of each organization making it difficult to answer with certainty. Did they have able leaders, enough recruits, adequate training, enough weapons even for training, enough supplies, health workers, food, drink, mental fitness that is called for? Was funds collected that is enough for an army to survive until the political situation changes and critical mass is achieved?

Organizing, training and leading an army into battle is not a simple proposition. Engaging an organized force like the TPLF army is not a picnic. I am sure it requires painstaking attention to details and a highly motivated and able leaders with troops trained militarily and politically. Why our organizations have not fared well in Eritrea till now is a question they have to answer. I doubt blaming it on Eritrea is such a good idea. That is the cowards' way out. You mean to tell me in twenty years you failed to find another way if you think that one is a dead end?

If the idea was for Shabia to feed and train Ethiopians to fight Woyane then it was a very naive assumption. To think Shabia would fight for our freedom is way off the mark. You are on your own buddy. Shabia led and fought with TPLF to achieve its goal of liberating Eritrea. They did not fight for TPLF. If Shabia is willing to give us a corridor to fight their old friend Woyane and Patriotic Front /G7 say they are determined to accept the offer and also work with many more others to bring freedom why would one object? We should find that reassuring and the road to empowerment.

Each organization leads its own sovereign existence based on its beliefs and aptitude. I have no question Ato Andargachew laid the best foundation for such life to emerge from

his group. Patriotic Front /G7 are a qualitative change in our struggle. We celebrate that while we support all those arrayed against the minority based regime.

The peaceful means is still going strong in Ethiopia. Semayawi and Andenet are exposing the emptiness of the system. Slowly they are teaching their people that we do not submit easy. Their struggle is as hard as any. Their survival is challenged on a daily basis. They have no newspaper, no radio, no text messaging, nothing! They are harassed by government paid goons, their family is threatened and people are forced to stay away from them but persevere.

Kinijit, Andenet, Semayawi, Ginbot7 and more will come. What comes next should be qualitatively better than the previous one. That happens when we learn from mistakes, build on our success and celebrate our accomplishments. Our weapons should be aimed at the mafia regime not at phantom enemies and close allies. It is important we contemplate before we hold public dialogue without adequate understanding or deeper studies. What I noticed in the west is that when they want to solve a problem they usually invite experts from their think tanks so they would give the listener perspective based on solid knowledge. It usually gets better and superior results benefiting all of society without undue alarm.