

Getting rid of “*The Enemy*”

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I wrote an article under the title **The Black and White of Civil Disobedience and Armed Struggle**, some two years ago. The same article was posted on different websites again some months later. In the past week and the current, I have witnessed a growing and encouraging debate on the method of struggle against the tyrant regime in Ethiopia. Writers like, Ephrem Madebo, Robel Abaya, Andragachew Tsige, ‘Meles Cadre’, Tesfaye Maru, Amanuel Zelalem, Al Mariam and others have shared their opinions and/or the stand of the party the represent.

This debate has been going on among politicians, activists, scholars, philosophers and citizens in general for a very long time. The common denominator for the debaters in both side of the aisle, and for those who see a middle way, is that there is an undemocratic, non-elected, tyrannical regime in power.

By the same talking, the writers above and others, have no ambiguity and dilemma about the nature of the EPRDF Regime in Power. Al Mariam puts it best. It is a regime that has committed “...*crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide committed against the people of Ethiopia...*”. “... *massive violations of human rights and political repression, rigged and stolen elections, systemic corruption, economic mismanagement and the rapacious plunder of the country’s resources by a syndicate of criminals who try to palm themselves off as a legitimate “government”. ...the top corps of the woyane leadership consists of cunning, ruthless, vicious and stone-cold criminals who maintain themselves in power by force of arms only...*”

Yet, there seem to be a difference on whether or not to call the regime ‘*The Enemy*’. Al Mariam, very articulately, presented the two sides. I failed to understand though, how Al Mariam made the connection of calling the regime ‘*the enemy*’ to imply endorsing an armed or violent means of struggle or not calling the regime ‘*the enemy*’ to imply endorsing a peaceful, non-violent means of struggle. In any case, I believe the regime should not be called ‘*the enemy*’. Whatever the means is, if the end is to have a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation; then there should be no one excluded from the forum; even the regime itself. As cruel, ruthless and vicious as the regime is they are just the opponent and not ‘*the enemy*’. There could be a debate on whether or not the top corps of the leadership should face justice or whether there should be a national reconciliation process for the sake of the country’s best. Still, the ranks and files of EPRDF should have an equally important role as the oppositions. The politics of zero sum game, of being exclusionary, of abolishing everything of the previous regime and going back to square one takes us nowhere, in fact takes us backward. The actual ‘*enemy*’ then is the mind set of being a tyrant, brutal and cruel. That emanates from the mind set of miss-trust, selfishness, hatred, the feeling of us vs. them. If this mind set is within us, then we are ‘*the enemy*’.

I argue that the only way to fight ‘*the enemy*’ is changing the mind set. It is imperative to understand that people for various reasons will most definitely have different ways of viewing the issues. Just because we do not agree with them, does not mean they are ‘*the*

enemy' we have to get rid off. We do not have to hate them. We do not have to fight them by all means necessary. We have to be bale to transcend our ego, self-first and self-only, and trust that, in fact, they are just opponents. I strongly argue and strongly stress that, the fight against all opponents, including the tyrant; brutal, cruel regime in power should be in a non-violent peaceful method. It must be a fundamental belief that changing the mind set of mistrust, selfishness, hatred that leads to cruelty and brutality should be only by a non-violent peaceful method. '*The enemy*' is violent; more violence will only perpetuate that. There is no guarantee that the end result of the violent struggle will avoid '*the enemy*', if at all it can guarantee a change of regime. Therefore, the non-violent peaceful struggle should be a matter of fundamental principle and not a matter of convenience.

The Ginbot 7 movement, Andragachew Tsige, Ephrem Madebo, Tesfaye Maru and others argue that, though they have nothing against the non-violent peaceful struggle, currently the conditions in Ethiopia has made it close to impossible, if not entirely impossible. I completely agree on the assessment of the situation at the ground. Especially after the May 15 2005 election, the regime is using every possible, sometimes silly, measure to close the door tight on the non-violent peaceful struggle. It is as if the government has had the 'illnesses' of committing a 'mistake' of slightly opening the door for its opponents and has now developed an 'immunity' from the 'calculated risk'.

The above assessment though, should not be used as a justification of shifting the method of struggle. It misses the point, I argue, that the strength of the non-violent peaceful struggle and the success thereof depend by and large on the ability to organize and then galvanize the population for the cause and not much on the relative strength/weakness of the regime/opponent. There has to be a fundamental belief on the people that they are capable of engaging in a non-violent peaceful struggle; that they are capable of making a difference and bringing about change, if they have a cause to do so. Non-violent peaceful struggle will be successful if it is done by the people. That is why it should be a matter of principle and not a matter of convenience.

The non-violent peaceful struggle of 2005 in Ethiopia, led by the then Kinijit is a good point in case. The right thing that Kinijit rightly did at the time was awakening the people conscious that they in fact can bring about change, that they in fact can make a difference if they collectively decide to do so. Almost the entire population from East to West, from North to south; were not only seeking but also logging for change. In that regard the work was already cut out for Kinijit. Kinijit went out, told the people that it is possible to bring change through the ballot box, and while they do so it is only they and their creator that knows what happened in that ballot box. This galvanized the population, it put them to task. The entire population took that task, and did just that. Kinijit and the people of Ethiopia won the election. This is a pure case for a non-violent peaceful struggle, as best as it can get.

What happened after that is a different story. I share 'Meles Cadre's' point that Kinijit is also to blame for the failure of the non-violent peaceful struggle. I can not however, at any circumstance, agree with him on being for the regime until something better comes. That is a code, which most probably comes from the mouth piece of the regime's

propaganda machine, to mean 'let us all settle for the status queue'. However; I am one of those who believe that when the going get tough, when push came to shove, Kinijit blinked. They took their reliance from the people and put it on Diplomats. They relied on a group, that does not have an entirely same, if not an entirely different, agenda than what the agenda for the non-violent peaceful struggle was. The Diplomats wanted 'Stability' and once they were given the opportunity, they pushed for that agenda. Everything else after that is just history. My point here is that, the non-violent peaceful means of struggle did not meet the end because it was not pursued all the way. The success for that kind of method, as all other methods, largely depends on a careful grand strategy, strategies and tactics. Failure, do to lack of that, can not be concluded to be a failure of the method itself.

While Ephrem Madebo delivered a piece on violence and non-violence strategies, I read his article to be more of a rebuttal to Professor Mesfin W/mariam's speech in Washington DC. It is more of a comparative historical analysis on why the non-violent strategy has not been the only one successful. Al Mariam also deliberated on the issue and compared and contrasted the historic struggles of ANC led by Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King. But it is Andargachew Tsigie who gave a meticulous analysis on the method of struggles as applied to Ethiopia. In fact, if I have not missed anything, Andargachew Tsigie is the only one who spelled out the strategy the Ginbot 7 movement adopts. That gives me an opportunity to be critical about the movement.

As meticulous as it is, one has to read between the lines of Andargachew Tsigie's article to figure out what strategy the movement is and is not adopting. Before I attempt doing that, however, let me dwell a bit on what 'legal' means and how it is used by Andargachew Tsigie.

John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice, 1971* offers an account of justice as fairness. It begs to the very nature of human beings as a society to want others to have what it demands for itself. To have this kind of fair justice, one has to view it from neither side position but a position of neutrality that requires a veil of ignorance. The two governing principles argued by Rawls are *equal basic liberties* and *fair equality of opportunities*. "...*This second principle ensures that those with comparable talents and motivation face roughly similar life chances and that inequality in society work to the benefit of the least advantaged*". Hence it can only be justice, and should be respected as the governing law of the society, if the law up holds the basic liberties of human being and fair equality of opportunities. In my article ***The Black and White of Civil disobedience and Armed Struggle***, I quoted Saint Augustine saying "*An unjust law is no law at all. One who breaks an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly... and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law*". If we accept the characterization by Andargachew that 'Meles is the Law in Ethiopia', then being disobedient to that law is not being illegal and is no cause to go under ground. This is where I share the views of Amanuel Zelalem. But, I again, agree to the assessment made by Andargachew Tsigie et al, the 'Meles Law' situation makes the non-violent

peaceful struggle ever harder. Yet that should be even more reason for us to be determined and resilient, and not to have a change of mind and/or heart. I stress again, therefore, the non-violent peaceful method of struggle should be a matter of fundamental principle and not a matter of convenience.

Going back to Andargachew Tsigie's article, to figure out the alternate to the non-violent peaceful struggle offered by the Ginbot 7 movement, I used a method of elimination. Andargachew Tsigie presented four different possibilities. From the paper it can be learnt that the movement has opted out a non-violent peaceful struggle affirming its difficulty under present realities within the country. The paper also made it explicit that the armed struggle is out of option practically but will be put on paper to allow the movement to have a common ground for negotiation with those who are already fighting the regime on the field. (Quite honestly, Andargachew Tsigie lost me here). By elimination, then what the movements is opting for is a Peaceful but 'illegal' method of struggle. Amanuel Zelalem translated this to mean going under ground and adopting an EPRP style of struggle during the Dergue Regime. What escapes me is why the strategy is called 'Hulegeb' because it actually is selective. Berhane Mewa, the Ex-Secretary of the then KIL (Kinijit International Leadership) used to say the non-violent peaceful struggle encompasses every viable strategy except that involves fire arm. If the 'hulegeb' struggle does not include armed struggle, then the only difference between the 'legal' non-violent peaceful struggle and the 'hulegeb' struggle is then, the latter includes arm bearings and therefore goes under-ground. The justification for this method of struggle is that it allows the 'foot soldiers' to defend themselves. More over, it allows for the movement to have the upper hand, as it will be proactive, and will have an element of surprise while taking 'action' against the regime.

The biggest predicaments of the 'hulegeb' struggle, as defined above, I argue, are; while it goes under ground, it risks alienating itself from the population and hence at least at its early stage does not become a popular movement. It basically fails to recognize the capability of the people to be defiant and not only defend themselves but also compel the regime to negotiate, comply or even be removed. The risk of the 'hulegeb' struggle, as shared by Amanuel Zelalem, is it can make the regime react madly and 'shoot every where, at every one'. It is very likely for the regime to react that way as it does not know from where, when and how an action against it is committed. There is the risk, God forbid, of the white and red terror, all over again. And worst, there is no guarantee for its success (success here meaning change of regime and not getting rid of *'the enemy'*). We all know the EPRP 'lost' for Dergue.

Tesfaye Maru goes beyond describing and analyzing the method of struggle adopted by Ginbot 7 movement, and makes an effort to explain that the formation of Ginbot 7 and its action will help the non-violent peaceful struggle in Ethiopia. This indirect benefit to the struggle is evidenced, according to Tesfaye Maru, by the regimes relative favoritism to wards UDJ. I argue that this analysis is off beam. The interest of the regime is to stay in power at all costs, even if it is just for one day more. The greatest treat to its power is the unity of the people, and no other power is a greater treat. What the regime is doing is creating a crack, and widening it if possible, in that unity. This apparent favoritism

observed by Tesfaye Maru is nothing more than just that. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that Ginbot 7 indeed becomes a significant treat. I would not doubt that the leaders and rank and file members of UDJ will be the first to pay the price.

Before I put my pen, in fact my key board, to rest, let me sum it up. Al Mariam shade light for us what '*the enemy*' is. It is not some one or a group who has a different point of view than us; it is not some one or a group that practices differently. '*The enemy*' is the mind set of thinking that way. If we have that mind set, then '*the enemy*' is within us. It is this mind set of selfishness, ego, fear, untrustworthy, which emanates itself by being brutal, vicious, tyrant, a dictator that we have to stand against. To fight this mind set, adopting a non-violent peaceful struggle should be a matter of fundamental principle and not a matter of convenience. The non-violent peaceful struggle, believes on the ability of the people to be defiant and make a regime negotiate, comply or even be removed. It encompasses every viable method except a fire arm and does not bend to what is labeled as 'illegal' by a regime. The end of the non-violent peaceful means of struggle is getting rid of '*the enemy*'. On the other hand a violent struggle perpetuates violent. While it may be able to change a regime, there is no indication if it will get rid of '*the enemy*'.

Finally, I take to task, the likes of Al Mariam and Abebe Belew of Addis Dimste (Washington, DC) to organize and moderate a forum of debate/discussion on the ideas of the different kind of strategies. While it clarifies the cloud in the sky about the issues, even better, it let us practice arguing and debating with out labeling each other as '*the enemy*'.