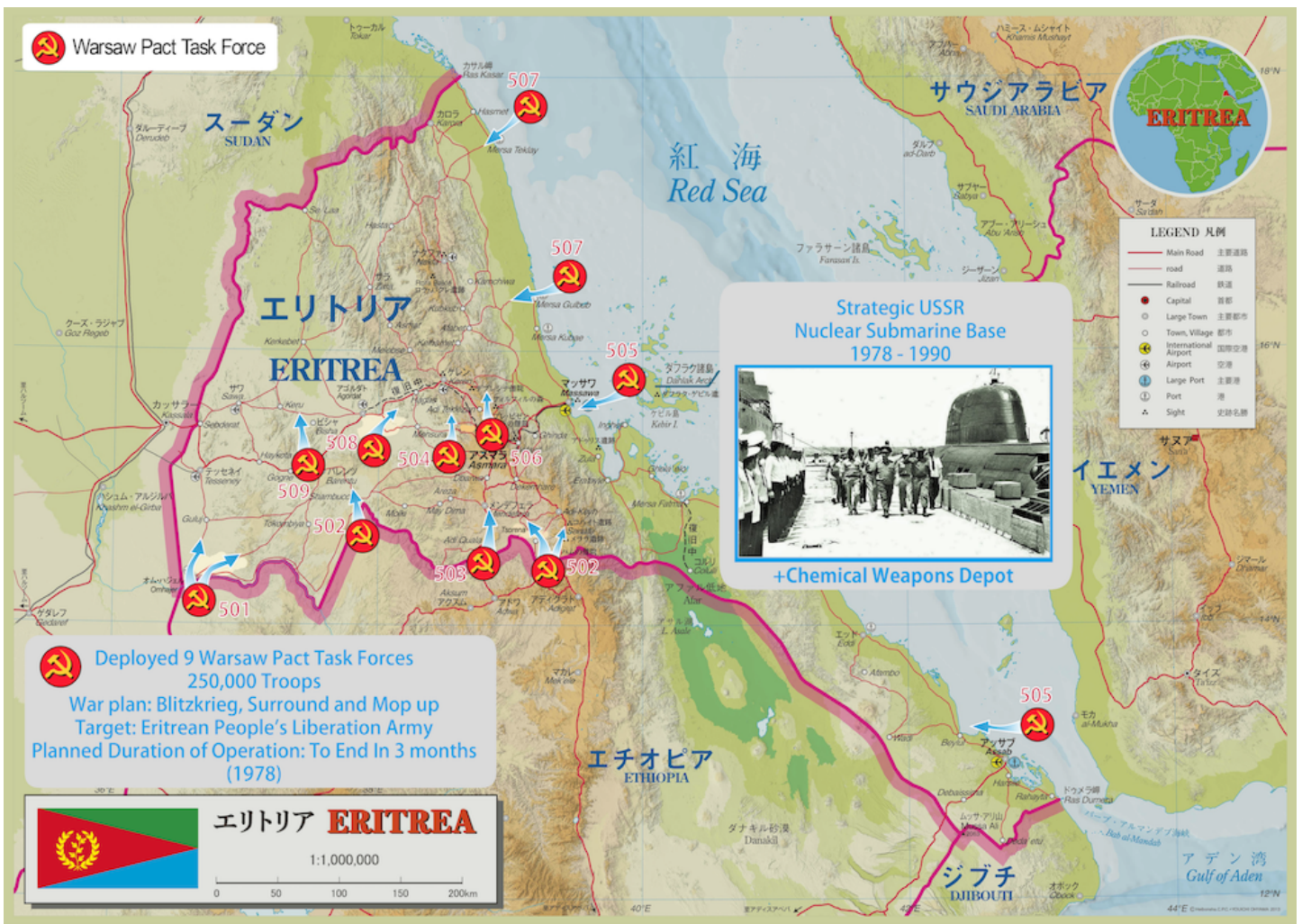


COMMEMORATING FENKEL OPERATION

February 10, 1990

The Antithesis of Warsaw Pact Military Plan of Blitzkrieg, Encirclement & Mop up Operations of 3 Months Extended to 144 Months

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INTRODUCTION

“Fenkel” is a word in the Tigrigna language used to describe the process of pulling something, especially a big stone out of the ground.

Having amassed over 250,000 newly armed troops, which included highly equipped mechanized, naval and air force power machines on the main Entry Ports of Eritrea i.e., Asmara, Massawa, Assab, Omhajer, Mereb, Tserona, Zalemessa, and the Red Sea Island of Dahlak, the Warsaw Pact military strategy was unleashed primarily focused on securing an important strategic military location and economic sphere of influence in the Horn of Africa in 1978.

The military campaign was composed of a carefully built in military roll-out plan laid out to be put in action on the ground with a strategic objective to destroy Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army (EPLA) in a period of three months composed of 1) blitzkrieg attacks, 2) encirclement, and 3) to carry out a mop up operations on the resultant of the to be dispersed remaining forces.

EPLA was in full control of Eritrea except part of the Port of Massawa and the capital Asmara which remained in the hands of the enemy and were heavily contested at this particular period.

This military campaign was launched in Ethiopia with a lot of leftist rhetoric, propaganda and military parades of showing of military might based on a self-centered economic and security interest of the Warsaw Pact. This security interest and plan overrode all other concerns of the independence and sovereignty rights the people of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and other countries in the region.



BACKGROUND

Early 1972 a new Warsaw Pact political formula was planned and planted for the Horn of Africa. Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam who took over as chairman in 1975, was an officer who was craftily used as trojan horse when Ethiopian political landscape was manicured by Dr. Senay Likke who worked closely in alliance with the military elites of that period to organize a military coup against the Imperial rule of Haile Selassie. Dr. Senay worked on this project closely in all his capacity in Ethiopia since 1972. A key figure who believed and promoted what was then called a non-capitalist road of development with clear option of military takeover to bring about socialist reforms in the feudal Ethiopia and the region. A concept idea that was then widely prescribed by the Warsaw Camp to all developing countries not only Ethiopia.

West leaning chairman of the Ethiopian Military Government, General Aman Andom was brutally killed for pressing a political

solution to the Eritrean question in November 1974. Similar attempts made by Brigadier General Tafari Benti, General Getachew Nadew, Major Sissay Habte and many others that followed their footsteps were also brutally quashed in 1975 and 1976.

The dominant Workers Party of Ethiopia, other less powerful factional groups surfaced and an Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities was established lead by Dr. Ashagre Yigletu, an Ethiopian educated in Belgrade Yugoslavia and Emanuel Ghebreyesus an Ethiopian with Eritrean origin who belonged to the radical group of the University of Addis Ababa in the 60th. Regional autonomy was flouted as a political option and as a solution to the Eritrean question through these kind of premediated preparations made on the ground in this period.

The principal architect and ideologue of the Military Government of Ethiopia since 1972 and the founder of the 40,000 manned peasant army named “Raza Project”, Dr. Senay Likke was killed in a palace squabble and rebellion on February 1977. In response to it, Red Terror was declared officially by the Chairman of the Military Government of Ethiopia Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam as the order of the day in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Subsequently, thousands of peace-loving youths were murdered in cold blood all over Eritrea and Ethiopia. Mengistu became the saint and the youth of Eritrea and Ethiopia became the sinners.

Though EPLA took the initiative and quashed the above-mentioned “Raza Project”, Megistu and his main culprits like Dr. Senay Likke and Dr. Negede Gobeze who were then in active power continued to rally the famine ridden population of Ethiopia on the side of the Warsaw pact war campaign by labeling Eritrea and Ethiopian oppositions as an instrument of imperialism and Arab petro-dollar.

RAPID DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES

From 1941 to 1974 the epicenter of past military campaigns was the Imperial Government of Ethiopia which was heavily dependent on NATO military and diplomatic assistance in which US, Britain, France, Israel and Italy were key. But the shift of alliance made in 1977 from White House to Kremlin by the Military Government of Ethiopia to equip its armed forces with a new weaponry, know how and technology necessitated fast deployment programs which was readily committed by the Warsaw Pact nations.

Meantime and in the interim i.e. 1977, while this was in process Yugoslavia, Turkey, USSR, Cuba, South Yemen, East Germany and North Korea army filled in the vacuum fast and with ease. Building up the act of rapid deployment of forces became the order of the day. The Communist and Socialist parties in Italy and France also played a significant role during this period as facilitators and creating the necessary tie-ups. Hence, rapid deployment of forces from the Middle East, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe to East Africa, were put in action successfully, in few weeks and months, in a scale never seen before in the history of Africa.

Many Ethiopian army members and newly recruited personnel were dispatched, to different fields, both inside and outside the country, for various intensive indoctrinations and military training programs. Poor farmers of Ethiopia were also recruited to the army in great numbers under a slogan “Everything to the War Front”. The famine that prevailed in Ethiopia was extensively exploited for military ends.

NO STONE WAS LEFT UNTURNED

East German administration systems of control, locally named as “Kebele”s, were widely introduced to control the population of

the Horn of Africa and established in remote localities, villages, towns and big cities. The sudden introduction of this systemic indulgences, particularly on the societies of Eritrea and Ethiopia, had a seismic effect on the weak socioeconomic situation of the region that was prevailing as a whole.

Warsaw Pact multipronged diplomatic initiatives loaded with a sophisticated game play for the containment of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) were also unleashed in Berlin, Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Aden and various capitals of Europe openly in 1978.

Intelligence works, covert and overt became rampant, all over the landscape of the political activities of the Horn of Africa. It was applied with professional skills and was persistently applied for old cracks to widen and new ones to appear within the Eritrean and Ethiopia resistance movements.

Interplay with Eritrean contemporary political figures of that time were also intensified all over. Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was coaxed into a submission through meetings held in Baku City (USSR), Damascus (Syria) and Khartoum (Sudan) and other places in this process. All inhouse efforts and attempts that were made to bring together the EPLA and ELF forces into a united front to jointly face the imminent danger were successfully frustrated through these kinds of heinous activities.

Geopolitics in its crude form started the process of fermenting religious and ethnic faults of the Horn of Africa, including but not excluding in Eritrea, by bringing forward a new political game play based on "self rule" or what was called then as "regional autonomy".

The old colonial divide and rule game, used in the Horn of Africa in the past, was craftily put in a new bottle with a new label of social justice for people. The number of politicians in the region who fell in love with this new formula of political solution were not

few. In Eritrea, when the number of the faction leaders increased in number, the Military Government of Ethiopia encouraged by the outcomes, further down graded this political solution option into “Kolama” (lowlander) and “Degama” (highlander). Various meetings that were held during this historical period by different stake holders in the Horn of Africa, Nile Basin and the Middle East region on the question of Eritrea, including Palestinian and Syrian leadership, were visible facilitating activities that lead towards these kind of outcomes too.

Though Erich Honecker of East Germany (Berlin) and Leonid Brezhnev of USSR (Moscow) in the series of meetings which were held with political leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, in the late 1977 and early 1978, failed to achieve their immediate need and requirements for a political capitulation of Eritrea and Somalia, but that doesn't mean, taking all considerations, its impact on the political landscape of Eritrea was by no means negligible. By proxy, fifth column activities in the war zones were enhanced which subsequently led into the fatal and suicidal demise of the Eritrean Liberation Front in 1980.

Ethiopian journalist Bealu Girma has attempted to capture in his book Oromay ("No Return") this phenomenal drama of history that unfolded. It would be a disservice to leave the reader with a picture of this period without mentioning his skillful eye witness reportage done from a knowledge and observation at a close range.

October 22, 1978 the Central Committee of EPLF decided on a new strategy to face this military onslaught on its terms, priorities and local given realities. After deliberating and assessing carefully all the options availed to EPLA, it was decided in this historical meeting to face the unfolding Warsaw war strategy, mentioned-above, on a selected mountain chains called the Nubian Shield or popularly called by the freedom fighters of Eritrea as Sahel mountains. The leadership also approved a road map for a new military, security, diplomatic, political,

economic, social setup and preparedness to face the imminent challenges. Given the political, diplomatic and social local realities, it allocated its human resources capacity to face the Warsaw war campaign accordingly.

Though this historic move was taken based on a very pragmatic assessment of the prevailing diplomatic and military build up that surrounded Eritrea during this historical juncture, the Warsaw Pact generals were taken by surprise by the EPLA military pre-emptive and strategic moves. But unfortunately, it was only after a total catastrophic failure of more than seven waves of major military attempts and offensives they made that these generals to see reality they conducted in the course of ten years. More than 223,870 Ethiopian soldiers were put out of action by EPLA in these engagements which included seven blitzkrieg attacks, which resulted in a zero military objectives, which were carried out seven times from different fronts and major scale until 1983. EPLA not only did it successfully defeated the enemy on its own chosen strategic options, it utilized prudently the weaponry and military resources that were usefully disarmed, captured, and skillfully refurbished during the process too. "Face the enemy with his own gun and bullets" was the cardinal motto of EPLA in all the battles waged.

In 1983 that the Military Government of Ethiopia invited EPLF to secret meetings that were led by Security Chief Colonel Tesefai Weldeselassie. His team consisted of Dr. Alemu Abebe, Dr. Shiwandagn Belete, Dr. Ashagre Yigletu, accompanied by their bureaucrats and security staff. The signs for the crumble of the military regime were obvious and all over during the course of these meetings. Delegation members were at logger head many times depending on to which faction or party group they belonged. The Attempt of President Ali Nasir Muhammad of South Yemen and North Korea last attempts to save the regime was the last manifestations observed during these meetings. President Ali Nasser worries on ensuing power struggle then in South Yemen, Eritrea's perspectives of South Yemen internal politics and

regional peace were very obvious among regional concerns observed too. South Yemen and North Korea Army was a major army, mechanized, navy and air force contributor in the Warsaw Campaign against EPLA too. Though Coup attempt against Mengistu failed during this period of the war fissures in the internal system of the Military Government of Ethiopia were vivid and rampant.

FENKEL OPERATION

Continuous open democratic dialogue of the rank and file under a tree which predates the long history of the people of Eritrea, efficient communication, logistics and mobility were key to the successful mobility of EPLA without which the number equation with the Warsaw Pact forces would have remained an impossible riddle to tackle. Bringing the operation room and the paramedics close to the battle fronts was an achieved successful task though preparation for the threat of the use of chemical weapon remained another daunting challenge to EPLA.

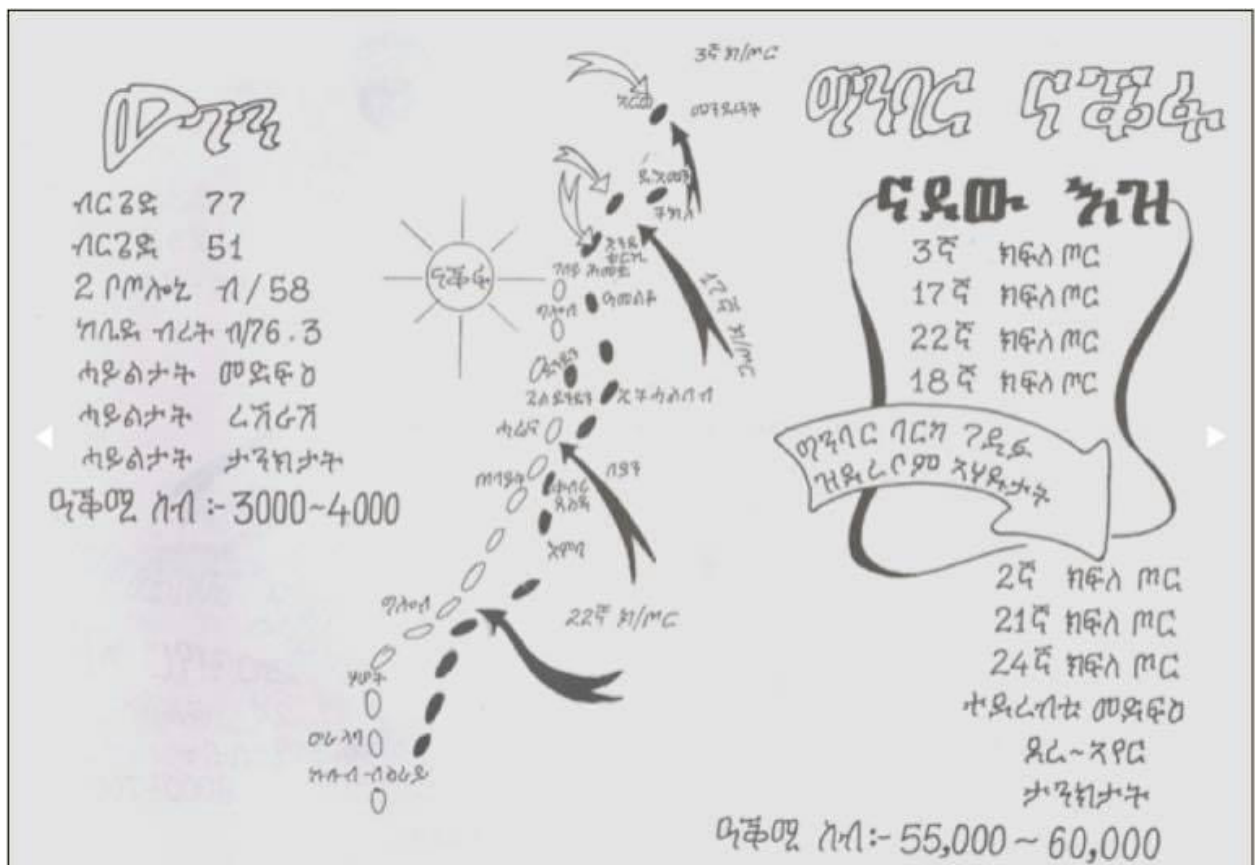
Using the needle with the same care as a cannon, the knife as a hoe, a flat stone as an oven, a bunker as a home, humbly asking the lizard and snakes to go somewhere for a human body to take rest, wearing hand remade tight pants, to keep the leg from making noise to unnecessarily warn the enemy during the busy nights, shaped the indomitable brotherhood and high spirit of the freedom fighters.

During those days, it was not uncommon to hear Bob Marley's and Tsehaytu Beraki's music playing in harmony with echoes reverberating on the trenched spreading on the high mountain ranges and deep valleys which were inhabited against all odds by the freedom loving generation of Eritrea.



On August 1988, after ten years of a heroic and protracted defensive war of wear and tear which was carried out in the ranges and valleys of the Sahel mountains and its environs, EPLA made a decisive strategic offensive to occupy a major front surrounding the town of Afabet. Proper preparations that were carefully made ahead of the offensive greatly contributed to the success of this historic battle. Afabet is a strategic town, which hosted the masterminds of the war, i.e., Warsaw Pact and their allies' command station for ten years. A town located south of the mountains of Sahel, which serves as a trade corridor to and from the agricultural and resource-rich west and the eastern coastal lowlands of Eritrea.

Wuchu, a veteran army commander in the EPLA, introduced the start-up of the offensive to the rank and file of his division by naming this battle as an “open-end invitation to a funeral”. Basil Davidson, British historian who witnessed the battle, also named it “Second Diem Bien Phu”. Both agreed in their statements and assessments that the success of this historic initiative shall change, once and for all, the gravity of the military landscape in the Horn of Africa.



This battle heralded and opened a new momentum and valuable opportunity, for EPLA, to use its seasoned, infantry, mechanized, naval forces coordinated firepower and the long experience and rich experiences that were accumulated during the long years of war. All the lessons accumulated in the past, including but not excluding the outstretched elite commando forces capability outside the perimeter of these battle events, were effectively and innovatively used as an instrument to win this historic battle decisively.



The offensive was unanimously welcomed and supported by the local population in Eritrea and abroad. Local Ethiopian army, navy and air force mutinied but were unfortunately crushed mercilessly in the war fronts and cities.

In 1989, EPLA engaged the remaining heavily armed enemy. It continuously stretched itself on the coastal lowlands - to effectively and fully control the Red Sea coast and adjacent Islands. The life-line to the USSR backed Ethiopian army, Massawa – Asmara – Addis Abeba road corridor, fell into the hands of EPLA. All attempts to recover this post by the enemy forces were once and all frustrated and crushed.

In 1990, all concentric defensive lines of the enemy, armed to the teeth, stretching for about 70 to 80 kms, guarding the Port of Massawa and the strategic USSR submarine nuclear post in the Island of Dahlak (Nakura) from land, sea and air, were also again painted with pictures of heroism. Port of Massawa was freed.

Fenkel Operation and its vibration engulfed East Africa. It induced White House and Kremlin hotlines to go operational. Diplomatic pressures of superpowers got intensified. Scud missiles rained in the freed Massawa Port and its environs but this time fired only from a distant USSR war ships which were anchored faraway on the Red Sea, for days. EPLA which was composed of men and women fighters stood stead-fast and made Massawa (“Pearl of the Red Sea”) - the epicenter of freedom. 30% of the fighting force were women.

A new phenomenon started coming to the surface of the region’s politics during this momentous period. Contra experiences with old sleepers and new operatives came out to the surface of the proxy geo-politics of the Horn of Africa. TPLF and Ethiopian former elite soldiers trained in US started to gather momentum of relevance to fill in the power vacuum created as a result. Powerbrokers in line with this new diplomacy were intensified in the region. US invites EPLF to a series of open peace talk with the Military Government of Ethiopia. Sudan and other regional security players also came on board.

All attempts to bring together to the same platform, i.e., EPRP, OLF and other opposition movements were frustrated by TPLF strategic priorities. To close the chapter of dialogue which was essential to regional peace, TPLF killed EPRP leader Tsegaye Gebremedhin and his close colleagues in Mekele 1989.

Regeneration of resistance in Ethiopia and Addis Abeba prevailed though it was for a short period of time. The need for the fighting to be concluded in landmass of Ethiopia became obvious.

With this as an objective the long march of EPLA flanking from the north, covering a distance of about 1200 kms from the Port of Massawa, started homing to the main command headquarters of the enemy both in Assab (Eritrea southern port city), Addis Abeba (Capital of Ethiopia) and from the west another distance

of about 1500kms from the Port of Massawa homing to the headquarter of Debrezeit (Main Air force of Ethiopia).



EPLA took the entire East Africa in its canvas and painted a picture of heroism, putting another milestone of solidarity and cooperation in history between the brotherly people of the region. In 1993, the guns of terrorism were silenced in East Africa by “Operation Fenkel”. The people of Eritrea and Ethiopia were freed at last.

It would be misleading to leave the reader with history of optimism and a picture of enthusiasm of this period. Eritrea has learned its lesson through an arduous and difficult road of resistance against injustices which left the country in wanton distractions, forced immigration, poverty, underdevelopment and a painful mark of more than 60,000 of heroes and heroines who gave up their precious lives and thousands who were made physical and mental invalids in defense of Eritrea - in this savage war - never seen or experienced in the history of the African continent before.

Operation Fenkel was a dedicated continued wave of compassion and demonstration for truth by people which included visionaries of every race, sex and creed and is currently commemorated with great honor every year, on February 10, in the Port of Massawa Eritrea, the Pearl of the Red Sea.

