

# People's Front for Democracy and Justice Secretary General Mr. Alamin Mohamed Seid: "The emergence of the EPLF as a political power promoted the geo-political interest of the Eritrean people"



Mr. Alamin Mohammed Seid

*Mr. Alamin Mohammed Seid, we would like to begin our question with the first stage of our struggle 1977-1987. This stage has significant place in our struggle with regards political and military developments. It was also a period in which there was Soviet interference and the EPLF was compelled to shifting from an offensive into a defensive position and conduct strategic withdrawal. Could you please tell us what was the situation during this stage?*

First I would like to thank you for having me. It is also very important for we are going 25 years back and talk about past events and draw important experiences. If we are to talk about the demise of Nadew Command (What we call Nakfa Front) and the liberation of Afabet town we have first to look at the situation prior to that. It is very important to look at the general picture between 77 and 87. How was the Command demolished? What victory was gained? How did the situation emerge? It is very important to look at these questions separately.

One important aspect during this stage was the strategic withdrawal and the change of military balance. Until 1977 the balance of power was in favor of the EPLF but after that the situation changed. An important political development emerged in the field that went on for ten years, from 1977-1987. That was the Second and Unity Congress was conducted and with that the unity within the Eritrean revolution was realized. The struggle continued within the framework and credence of the EPLF. Hence, the Second and Unity Congress was an important political milestone.

The second scenario that emerged during this time was the interference of the Soviet Union. This external intervention had two strategies: the enemy and the external forces that took side with the enemy with a motive to deny the fundamental rights of the Eritrean people (the Soviet Union and its allies-South Yemen, some Palestine organizations) on one hand and the EPLF and other revolutionary fighters on the other. The antagonism was between these two forces. This stage was very complicated and intertwined. How did the EPLF pass through that? The liberation struggle sustained because all Eritreans nationalists from all factions stood together against the external invasion and against the sub-nationalist elements within the revolution. That was a very historic stage in which the unity of the true nationalists was realized.

The other scenario observed within these 10 years was the drought. There was severe drought. The situation was very challenging for both the Eritrean people, the EPLF as well as for the Horn of Africa. However, the EPLF shouldered the task of alleviating and controlling these challenges; it set up camps and run programs to provide shelter and care for dislocated families and orphaned children and it eased the problem.

The other aspect worth mentioning during this stage was the political activity. From 1977 to 1987 rigorous political activities were conducted targeted at the population and the combatants. Conducting strategic withdrawal was by itself historical. The second aspect of the EPLF's political work pertained to mass organizations. The fundamental policy was to organize the Eritrean masses on the basis of their social status into associations of workers, peasants, students, women as well as professionals. Empowering the people was a big task of the time. The strategy of the EPLF was to free the land and people stage by stage. In other words after liberating the land the task was enabling the population participate in political activities through forming resistance committees. The challenge was on how to materialize the then slogan of the EPLF: politicizing, organizing and arming the people. In the 1977-1987 periods the efforts made to promote the role of women were also of special interest. The EPLF gave special attention to women to ensure their participation in the struggle for independence. Hence, it was made possible that the Eritrean women become exemplary by heroically demonstrating their importance in the struggle.

The other aspect I would like to mention was the different attempts waged by the enemy quarters to foil the Eritrean revolution through means of arms, media and diplomatic maneuvers. However, the EPLF was able to conduct significant media and diplomatic activities reorganizing itself inside the country and abroad.

With the strategic withdrawal there were many who doubted the continuity of the revolution. There were also some which thought that was the end of the Eritrean revolution. The EPLF, however, continued the struggle employing sophisticated strategies and tactics and possessing superior consciousness and morale. Hence, the period could be described as a period in which the EPLF came triumphant by foiling different offensives by the Derge regime. The EPLF is huge organization and it was a huge success for it to organize a formidable army we call EPLA.

***We understand that the interference of the Soviet Union in 1977-78 was very trying time for the Eritrean revolution. But still the EPLF came out stronger; what was the secret behind it?***

The secret is being Eritrean; the perseverance of the Eritrean people. In 1977 almost 95% of the land was liberated. 90% of it under direct administration of the EPLF and due to the massive Soviet interference the balance of power shifted in favor of the Derge regime and we were compelled to conduct strategic withdrawal. Expectation for an external help had been always the culture of the successive Ethiopian regimes. The Haileselasie regime stayed in power during the Second World War because of direct assistance from the west. Eritrea was condemned to stay under Ethiopian rule because of unjust decision on the part of the west, especially of that of the US. Likewise, the Derge regime in 1977 realizing its defeat at the hands of the EPLF sought help from the Soviet Union. And it received massive military hardware and the military hardware was transported to Eritrea by cargo planes and ships.

With the circumstances on the ground the EPLF was compelled to withdraw from the 90% land which was under its administration. The strategic withdrawal did not mean taking a leap back to the base area. The basic elements of the strategic withdrawal were preserving human resources, conserving weapons, boosting morale of the combatants, inflicting human, material and morale losses on the enemy. That demonstrated the strong quality and far sight of its leadership. That was the secret of the EPLF and is documented in the annals of history. There was strong belief on the EPLF's leadership, perseverance and firm stance.

***The Eritrean revolution at the time did not have recognition from the two camps. It has been also said that "The Eritrean revolution is committing suicide". What was that the two camps failed to see? What is the secret for the EPLF to emerge triumphant passing through such trying time?***

Eritrea, in geo-political perspective, is located along the Red Sea and in the Horn of Africa. The area has geo-political importance. If you have the desire to control the Red Sea, the Horn of African and above all the Indian Ocean you have to occupy Eritrea. This is the core problem on the part of the world powers. It is a matter of interest. And the only power, in their eyes, that could guarantee their interest in the region is not the EPLF but the regime in Ethiopia. They first said that was the Haileselasie regime that could ensure their interest. The Haileselasie regime was overthrown by the military junta. Then they associated to with the junta believing that could safeguard their interest. On the other side the EPLF is the owner of the land and has strong and committed people ready to fight for their right. Frankly speaking thanks to the EPLF the Eritrean people reached to this stage. The emergence of the EPLF as a power promoted geo-political interest of the Eritrean people. And I still believe that the geo-political interest of the Eritrean people will be further realized by the EPLF.

***During that stage the Derge regime had one of the strongest armies in the region. And because the regime was conducting successive military invasions there was no breathing space. The EPLF was engaged in repulsing the enemy invasion on the front line as well as conducting different activities behind the front line including establishing peoples' assemblies, empowering women, providing academic education***

*to combatants, sports activities as well as political education. How do you explain this stage as political victory?*

Military campaign is part of political process. To consolidate the political process we had to build a strong army. There was no other means and that was the core understanding of the occupation forces. Political works have also to be done within the combatants and people in the liberated areas. Regular political education was introduced to raise political consciousness of the combatants and the people and establishment of popular assemblies and mass organizations. That had to be conducted parallel with the military developments. The end result of all the political activities is to reinforce the combat capacity of the revolution. The strategy pursued by the EPLF was to liberate the land and people stage by stage. To this end the EPLF set out and formulated clear military and political strategy. It was not an easy task. The period from 1977 to the liberation of Afabet was challenging. And the demise of Nadew Command and the liberation of Afabet was the sum total of all the undertakings I tried to explain.

*During that stage the Derge possessed a massive and seemingly inexhaustible military capacity, which enabled it to wage repeated offensives. Amid such situations there were defenses and counteroffensives on one side and building up your own resources on the other. The EPLF was able to establish popular assemblies behind enemy lines; elevate the rights of Eritrean women to the highest standards; sensitize and raise the fighters' awareness in academy, sport and politics. Mr. Alamin, how would you describe this stage in terms of a political victory?*

Military is an aspect of politics. If we were to carry out political activities the only choice we had was to ensure our military strength. Peaceful demonstrations, telegrams, meetings etc. did not coincide with the views of those seeking control of this region. Therefore, in line with the military campaigns, political awareness had also to be raised in Eritrea, which was the aim of the changes in the liberated areas that I have been mentioning: making sure that the general public participated in the political process by way of popular assemblies and other social forces, at home and abroad. It was a political phenomenon and the military activities served as its boosters. In such a way the geo-political interest of this region were able to be preserved. This was the cumulative political work. And in the end it evolved into a military dimension with the aim of gradually liberating Eritrean territory and reaching a definite political level.

This was referred to by some as a “worn strategy” as the concept of liberation of territory didn’t really work out in their minds. But the EPLF leadership had clear visions, objective calculations, and a distinct know-how of its military strategies and political maneuvers. It knew how to sensitize, organize and arm its people. But the struggle was not easy and that made this stage a difficult one. In terms of time, we can say from 1977 up to the demise of the Nadew Command. Therefore, the fall of the Nadew Front and the liberation of the town of Afabet were the outcome of everything I have been talking about and not some bonus from heaven or anywhere else.

*In 1987 when the EPLF was in a better position, the Second and Unity Congress was conducted between the EPLF and ELF leadership. Politically, what was the importance of this to the struggle for independence? What did this signify?*

In the first place, it confirmed the unity of the freedom fighters. Previously, unity was

understood differently by different ELF factions. On our part, we [EPLF] believed that the unity of the fighters was more important than the unity of a few people in the circle of leadership. National Unity could be promoted through bottom-up approaches, and not through a top-down process. This was a strongly shared perspective on the part of EPLF. The other groups, however, placed more emphasis on a top-down process of ensuring unity. However, such a process was likely to be a futile one as foundation of unity had to be strengthened at the grassroots level. We endeavored a lot to ensure unity through a bottom-up process. This was the stand of the EPLF since the early days of its formation. This belief was shared by the different groups that later formed the EPLF. These groups themselves (PLF group one, PLF group 2 and PLF group 3) were also able to be eventually united through such a process. The first and second groups raised the awareness of the fighters with the intention of developing mutually shared understanding regarding the common good of the country and the importance of unity in fighting the common enemy. Unity was achieved progressively through such a process. Through a progressive manner, stage by stage the fighters started to eat together, to fight side by side in the battle field and to trust each other. When PLF group one and the other two were united in such a process, the EPLF conducted its First Congress in 1977.

The Second and Unity Congress of 1987 was the result of such a cumulative process. At that time, unity was achieved between the EPLF and one major ELF faction Sagim. The EPLF also did its best to have the different ELF factions that remained in the field after the disintegration of ELF integrated in the struggle for the independence of Eritrea. Through such efforts, those groups were being integrated not to the EPLF but they were being integrated to the common cause at large. While EPLF was an independent liberation movement with its independent political programs that enabled it to lead the struggle for independence, not only the EPLF but the Eritrean people at large had a burning desire for independence. That is why 99.8% of the people of Eritrea voted for independence during the referendum that was conducted after the liberation of Eritrea. Actually, this was envisioned by the EPLF and this indicates that the EPLF reflected the heart-felt aspirations of the Eritrean people. The people on the other hand shouldered the responsibility of implementing the strategies designed by the EPLF. Without conducting referendum, the Eritrean independence could not have been achieved. This indicates the farsightedness of the EPLF. The EPLF was a committed leadership with clear objectives and action plans.

***In the 1980s, the EPLF had prepared a proposal regarding referendum. At that time, the proposal seemed to be not much acceptable. What was the reason behind preparing that proposal or considering referendum? Did this signify that the EPLF felt that it was weak or had some fears, or was it because the EPLF believed that it was the right thing to conduct referendum?***

At that time, close ties had been established between the Ethiopian regime and the Sudanese government (the Numeri administration) through the mediation of Italy, Aden, Libya and others. Certain issues were being raised by the aforesaid groups and other actors regarding the need to consider the Eritrean case as internal affair of Ethiopia and accordingly solve it internally within Ethiopia. Such actors might naively talk about the said concerns. The real motives, however, were associated with the

intention to promote the national interests of the United States of America and that of the Soviet Union through the green light that would be provided by the Megistu regime in Ethiopia.

This was engineered taking into account the geopolitical importance of Eritrea's strategic location. So it was a conspiracy. Given this situation, what choice was available to us? As the EPLF used to confidently know the heartfelt needs of the Eritrean people, this was not a challenge for it. At that time, there were continuous meetings in Port Sudan, Khartoum and in the field. Finally, the EPLF leadership decided in Khartoum that referendum would be necessary for our case and that would enable us to challenge those who would provide us with different packages of a proposal. Hence, the need to conduct referendum was decided then. The issue of self-determination was not an issue of concern only for the EPLF; it was an issue of concern mainly for the Eritrean people at large. So the Eritrean people had to be consulted and heeded. Whether the people of Eritrea wanted to be part of Ethiopia, wanted to be entirely independent or wanted to be granted some sort of self administration, the people had to be given a chance to voice their heartfelt concerns. All the aforementioned actors were shocked when the decision to conduct referendum was officially announced in 1980. They did not expect such a level of political consciousness and maturity in the Horn of Africa.

Hence, they were so surprised. This is one of the reasons or strengths why the EPLF has to be praised. It acted sensibly to promote the Eritrean cause. Implementing this decision ten years later was also one of the strengths of the EPLF. In relation to this issue, I strongly feel that the Eritrean people are lucky. In my view, if there were no EPLF, Eritrea would not exist as independent state and we would not talk about it proudly. It would be disintegrated and would exist in a different form. Stated differently, Eritrea would not be a united entity and it would not have an independent identity. This is the foundation of the state of Eritrea.

*Let us proceed to another chapter in the Eritrean struggle for independence. When it was decided to destroy the 'Nadew Command', what were the factors that were considered to take that step? How was the capability of the army stationed in the area and how was the extent of the coverage of the front that was under the control of the enemy? And what was the reason behind the decision on the part of the EPLF, what convinced the EPLF that it can successfully manage the military operation associated with destroying the said command? The EPLF unusually announced in a leadership meeting following its Second and Unity Congress that it would offensively attack the enemy. This encouraged the people very much. What enabled or caused the EPLF to officially say these things? Frustration? Eagerness to realize independence? Or were there objectively studied realities?*

The Nakfa Front was initially established in 1979 with the intention to control Nakfa. It was hoped that controlling Nakfa would enable the Derge to destroy EPLF bases. This was engineered to finally liquidate the EPLF. Consequently, in 1977 and 1987, there were many attempts to control Nakfa on the part of the enemy. The length of the front covered 165 kilometers. It extended from parts of the Red Sea coastal areas in the north to the parts of the Anseba region in the south. Its width was estimated to be 100

kilometers. It extended from Nakfa in the north to Meshalit in the south. The Eritrean fighters were also stationed accordingly in order to defend themselves effectively. This front was one of the demanding fronts. There were three large divisions of foot soldiers, one mechanized brigade, and ten artillery battalions. Overall there were about 20,000 enemy soldiers stationed at this front. But from 1st January 1987 onwards, the enemy was being weakened because the EPLF had previously started to repeatedly attack the enemy.

For example, the EPLF had attacked the Derge soldiers stationed at the Nakfa, Anseba, Halhal, Qinafna, Areza, Karneshim fronts. Consequently, some 7,000 enemy soldiers were killed, around 5,000 soldiers were wounded, and there were 1400 commanders and private captive soldiers. All these were part of the preparation for eventually controlling the Nakfa front. At the mid of 1987, the commander of the Nadew Command was Brigadier General Tariku. Tariku was killed by Mengistu. Besides, the commander of the Mekit Command, Brigadier General Kebede Gashaw, was also killed in the same way, another important commander who was also a member of the central Derge leadership, General Regassa Jima, was jailed, another important commissioner; Shewargaw Bihunegn (a member of the central committee of the Derge party) was also fired from his post. When these actions are examined in terms of military standards, these were just the consequences of the battles that took place at the mentioned fronts. In other words, the Derge suffered considerable losses due to the repeated attacks of the EPLF. It was after such successes that the EPLF attacked the Derge forces stationed at the Nakfa Front (Nadew Command) on 17-19 March 1988. The command was controlled by the EPLF within 73 hours. This was a step towards the Fenkil Operation. The Fenkil Operation in turn was a stepping stone towards controlling Dekmehare and then Asmara. 1977-1978 was a strategic withdrawal and then 1987- 1988 was characterized by EPLF'S strategic attacks against the Derg regime.

*Politically, there were also changes associated with the defeat of the Derge regime in Afabet. The Derge regime called for peace talks, and many countries also started to be interested in our struggle and accordingly there were also new forms of interference on the part of some countries. To this effect, what were the political gains associated with the defeat of the Derge at Afabet (the Nadew Command)?*

In the course of liberating Afabet or controlling the Nakfa front, the Nadew Command, one of the special military commands of the Derg, was almost entirely destroyed within 48 hours. This was a miracle performed by the Eritrean liberation fighters! After the strategic withdrawal, that is, after ten years of bitter struggle the Nadew Command was totally destroyed. Those bitter battles experienced by the freedom fighters and the people at large really showed the steadfastness and the strong commitment of the Eritrean people to ultimately make Eritrea an independent state. By the standards of military strategy, it was not thinkable to entirely control and destroy within 48 hours a front that covered 165 kilometers.

It really takes a long, long time to examine and recount how this was realized. To this degree, what is being narrated is just a fraction of what happened then. It was just a miracle. So what was its outcome? The fact that the Nadew Command was completely destroyed was a heavy blow to the Derge regime. It was for the first time in the Horn

of Africa that three military officers of the Soviet Union were captured in this battle. What made that very special was the fact that it was done by a mass liberation movement. Such a situation has never happened in history, elsewhere in the world. The Soviets were not captured in Somalia, Yemen or Afghanistan. But this just happened in Eritrea!

As a result, much was talked about the success associated with the defeat of the Derge regime in Afabet. Basil Davidson, a great English historian, for example said, "After 1954, it is for the first time in history that we are witnessing a mass liberation movement to cause such considerable losses on such a large colonial army." This is an important testimony and one can easily imagine the political gains resulting from such a successful achievement. Right after that front was destroyed, many who were previously against the EPLF started to be on its side and to voice their support for the EPLF. And many, including Gorbachev-who was Soviet Union's leader at that time started to say that the Eritrean case should be resolved through peaceful means. There were also two sessions held with Erich Honecker in Germany towards this purpose. He placed more emphasis on the need for a peaceful mechanism for resolving the conflict. This indicated that what was previously asserted, by saying that the case of Eritrea is an internal affair of Ethiopia that had to be addressed internally, was changed. But the EPLF was not disrupted by such futile initiatives. It launched the Fenkil Operation attack. That operation surprised many.

Like what Davidson asserted the Nadew operation was the first of its kind, after 1954 when the Vietnamese defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, in which a liberation movement was able to defeat a government that had a considerably large army. The fact that the Eritreans defeated the Ethiopians in that manner was a colorful achievement. The Derge regime along with its army was the most feared regime in our region (Yemen, Somalia and Sudan). When Eritreans patriotically defeated the regime at Afabet, they felt relieved. The fear associated with Ethiopia and its regime started to get eroded. In my view, the achievements linked with the Nadew operation motivated the Ethiopian Opposition groups of that time – the TPLF, the Oromo and others-to play a role in weakening the Derge regime by launching an attack within Ethiopia against the regime in a concerted manner with what had to be done by the Eritreans.

***Thinking that there were further sacrifices paid in the course of ultimately making Eritrea an independent state, why was the EPLF not able to make use of the calls for peace talks following the demise of the Nadew Command? There are some who feel that this would have been helpful for avoiding the sacrifices that were paid in the following three years (1988-1991)?***

The EPLF entirely liberated Eritrea in 1991. At that time, the EPLF could have declared the independence of Eritrea. But the EPLF realized that it was not a feasible option to do so and the need to conduct referendum was considered to be a more sensible option. Why? It was sensibly necessary to show that the independence of Eritrea was not an issue of concern for the EPLF only; it was also the burning desire of the people of Eritrea to make Eritrea independent. This is a just legal process. And that was why we waited for two years before the official recognition of Eritrea as an



independent state. However, it was quite possible, as it is common elsewhere, to immediately declare independence. In my perspective, if referendum were not conducted, some would say this type of independence was desired by the EPLF, but not by the people of Eritrea. In that case, it would be argued that the Eritrean people were not consulted. This would enable some actors to conspire with America and others to undo or at least to undermine the independence of Eritrea. In this case, the EPLF was proactively farsighted more than any other actor. And we have seen the result of referendum. More importantly, it was appropriately judged to be a sensible process as it was witnessed by the Ethiopians themselves and by the international community at large. They all witnessed the heartfelt desire of the Eritrean people. This was all the result of a job well done by the EPLF.

Mr. Alamin at the time the Nadew Command was destroyed, you were head of the Department of National Guidance. So in terms of news coverage, do you feel that the Nadew operation was comprehensively communicated? How was this issue handled at that time? Does the demise of the Nadew Command convey an important message or signal to the world? How effectively was it shared locally and internationally?

If we had half of the technology we have now, it would have been really helpful for covering the issue extensively and for sharing it widely. However, I feel that despite our meager resources, we were able to reasonably and widely communicate it. More attention was paid to it everywhere in the world. In Eritrea, there were Dimtsi Hafash (The Voice of the Masses) – radio and some magazines that used to communicate the good news and the achievements associated with it. Internationally, I believe those parts of the struggle with civil uniforms, journalists, who were the supporters of the struggle for independence in Eritrea, as well as solidarity communities that supported us were all helpful for covering the issue reasonably and extensively.

*It has been 25 years since Afabet was liberated and the Nadew Command was liquidated, and it has been 22 years since Eritrea finally became an independent state. Therefore, how do we assess, through retrospective and proactive, the effectiveness of the EPLF in discharging the responsibilities it started to shoulder many years ago? What are the most important issues of concern that can be raised at this stage of our history?*

There are a number of issues to be raised. It would be better to discuss such issues at some time in the future. While there are many concerns that we have to talk about, for this time it would be good to limit our discussions to the Nadew operation. I feel it is important to arrange a separate session for discussing our current concerns.

We were able to get where we are now simply because, the EPLF was able to strengthen itself and the Eritrean masses. Even now for Eritrea to be much stronger and to considerably push forward our achievements the front should further strengthen its capability, and its perspectives; it needs to be much stronger. What we should do and how we do what we have to do can be open to discussion. The fundamental issue is that the EPLF was so important in the past, and it remains to be equally important now. On my part, I do not tend to feel that there is an option to it. All the gains – political, military and any other gains – will be maintained only if the EPLF is

strengthened

further.

*As a freedom fighter and a senior official of the PFDJ, what messages do you want to share with the public?*

I would love to reiterate what I stated earlier. If everything we do is to be fruitful and effective in Eritrea, there is no option other than strengthening the front. All the citizens in this country, young and adults, have spent their precious time in the struggle and sacrificed all their resources for that matter. And still we should relentlessly continue what we have been doing. We need to work hard as ever before and we should be all committed. This is the belief of the EPLF. When I say the EPLF, I am not referring to individuals. I am talking about principles, about politics, about unity and about perspectives.

*While the EPLF was encircled in the Sahel hills, the struggle was against all odds. At that time, the freedom fighters had to pay all the sacrifices on their own with no option to reinforce what they were doing. To the contrary, the divisions of the Derge regime were being hatched almost daily. The regime had no problem at all to replace those who were either killed or disabled in the battles. Were there some doubts and a tendency to give up harbored in the minds of fighters during those trying times? How do you see such a situation?*

The EPLF becomes far stronger in trying times, unlike in stable situations. Trying times to the EPLF are the same as fire is to gold. As fire enables gold to glitter more, challenges further strengthen the EPLF. The EPLF was tested beyond measure, but it eventually tackled all the challenges that faced it. There were a number of groups and individuals who wished its demise, but the EPLF was able to effectively strongly resist all the odds and was able to ultimately get where it is now. Challenges make one much stronger.

At that time there was no option at all. The only resource was the fighter. When a fighter was wounded in a battle, it was a norm for him or her to go back to the trench with unhealed injury. The fighters used to refuse being hospitalized, even if they were medically required to do so. They wanted to go back to their comrades in the trenches so as to assist them in any form (e.g. relaying water) – even if their situation made it impossible for them to actually fight in the battles. It is this spirit that enabled the EPLF to succeed. Our enemy lacked this quality as it was overly dependent on external support. Actually, the Derge regime was overly supported by the super powers and many others. But all this was futile. To the contrary, the EPLF was not all externally supported. Let alone other supplies, we had no enough to eat; we endured and resisted hunger for years. The fighters resisted and endured everything. This is what we call a real freedom fighter. And this was the reason behind destroying the Nadew Command.

*Diplomatically, how was the image of the EPLF in the eyes of the international community and the impact of its diplomatic efforts? Did the Eritrean revolution have any allies at that time? If any, who deserve to be remembered now? It is often said that the foreign offices of the EPLF were repeatedly closed, would you shed more light on it?*

Virtually every foreign force was against the front. In this case, the support or lack of it can be described in two different ways – lack of official support on the part of

governments and individual level support. In the first case, we can take the Sudan as an example. All successive regimes – Abud through Numeri- of the Sudan, had never sided with the Eritrean revolution. The interest of all these regimes was aligned with Ethiopia. By their calculation, Eritrea is a small nation with only three million populations whereas Ethiopia, with 80 million populations, was a great nation. And they were calculating our relative capacity based on such factors. Therefore regimes with such kind of political infantilism fall under this category. So, despite the legitimate and just cause of Eritrea, they chose to side with Ethiopia.

In the 1950s, the regime of Huzbel Uma, which preceded the regime of Abud, had close friendship with Haileselesie. As a result the regime had no political will to duly consider the Eritrean question. To the contrary, the regime was torturing the Eritrean-Sudanese citizens for their sympathy with the Eritrean cause. These people had endured all such hardships! We Eritreans patiently and relentlessly endured such bitter experiences in our struggle to be an independent nation. We were tested by all forms of regionalism, tribalism and division along religious lines. But Eritrea stood against all odds.

To come back to your question, as I mentioned, there were two contrasting realities. While the leadership of the regimes had never sympathized with Eritrean revolution, we had grassroots support of their citizenry. The citizens of Sudan, Yemen and even Djibouti were on our side. In 1977-1978 Djibouti's regime closed our office there and jailed our representative, Hamd Ali Dafla. We inquired why such violence happened. There was no any justification. It was simply the direct influence of the Mengistu regime. But the people of Djibouti at that time were beside us. Even in Sudan the condition was the same; we had no any support from the political establishments but the citizens had close ties with the Eritrean revolution. Their citizens were reading our materials and were participating in our meetings. And the case in Yemen was also not different. Therefore we can say we had close grassroots support and solidarity with the people of the nations in our region. But there was no regime level support to the Eritrean revolution.

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