

What a Life!



The Autobiography of
Dawit Wolde Giorgis

Excerpts From Dawit's Book; What a Life !

PART III

The Soldier in ME

Upon completion of the training I was assigned to Eritrea, 2nd Infantry Division and began my military career. To be an officer at the age of 20 from a distinguished school and to be an infantry soldier equipped with special forces training and now about to command troops in one of the most volatile regions of Ethiopia was a momentous occasion in my life. All the troops we trained and commanded were older than me. To be an officer in HIM's Armed Forces filled me with a pride I carry to this day. Our pledge in front of the entire people of Ethiopia was of loyalty to our leader, our flag, to the well-being of our people, and the territorial integrity of the country. Our motto as stated by the commandant of the Academy, Brig.-Gen. Chaudhury on our last day was

- To uphold the safety, honor, and welfare of our country
- To uphold the honor, welfare, and comfort of the men you command
- Your own ease, comfort and safety comes last, always and every time

This is in keeping with the insignia of the Military Academy: "Country before Self." That is what I signed up for when I received the honor of becoming an officer in His Imperial Majesty's Army.....

Foreign Ministry

I reluctantly accepted the position of permanent secretary to the foreign minister, which was effectively the deputy foreign minister since there was no intermediary position between permanent secretary and minister at that time.

I believe being deputy commissioner of the RRC prepared me to take on the heavy assignment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My predecessors were *Ato* Kifle Wedajo, the minister, and *Ato* Getachew Kibret (permanent secretary). Though I cannot say much about *Ato* Kifle Wedajo whom I met only in exile I am proud to have known *Ato* Getachew Kibret who taught me so much and who I admire for his passion and commitment to the unity of the Ethiopian people and the territorial integrity of the country. After I took over from him, he had the time and the deep desire to brief me—I would say educate me—on the foreign policy of Ethiopia and the various issues that were central to it. *Ato* Getachew was a career diplomat, a student at Haile Selassie University and McGill University in Canada, a profound thinker, and a highly principled, knowledgeable gentleman. He was quiet but firm. I have had the opportunity to know many Ethiopian professional diplomats while in the Foreign Office and later in my other capacities but none stood out as tall or as wise as *Ato* Getachew.

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We arrived in Havana, Sept 8, 1980 via Rome and Madrid. We were received at the airport by the head of foreign affairs of the Communist Party, Comrade Montana. We stayed in two guesthouses, fully equipped. The next day we had discussions in the party headquarters while we waited for confirmation on the date to see Fidel Castro. On September 11, the eve of our new year and Revolution Day, we were told that we would see President Castro that day. While I was waiting to be driven to his office with Dr. Alemu Abebe and the Ethiopian ambassador Aemiro I suddenly saw a motorcade arriving at the place where we were staying. The motorcade stopped right in front of my guesthouse. I went to the door and I couldn't believe my eyes. There he was, Fidel Castro, stepping out of the car and walking towards us! He shook hands, asked how we were being treated, sat down in the living room and started talking just like a neighbor coming to visit a friend. Then at one point he said, "Mr. Giorgis, we come to your house and you're not offering us any drinks?" He was joking. That was the cue for his guards to go to their cars and bring drinks for everyone.

Then we had a real chat. It was an incredible session of advice and words of wisdom. He told us about the resilience of the people of Cuba and how they have survived and flourished despite sanctions and constant threats from the US just 90 miles away from the island. He assured us that the Cuban people would be with the Ethiopian Revolution as they had been all along.

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Following the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Governments held in Lusaka from August 1 to August 7, 1979, the UK invited Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, and Bishop Muzorewa to participate in a constitutional conference at Lancaster House. The purpose of the conference was to discuss and reach agreement on the terms of independence, the constitution, and supervised elections under British authority to enable Rhodesia to become independent and parties to settle their differences through political means. Ethiopia took a lead role in making sure that ZANU and ZAPU had a common position before they sat together to negotiate with Britain. Differences between the two would have been a disaster and would delay independence. In the month preceding the meeting Mugabe and Nkomo spent one week in Addis with Mengistu and later with a team of foreign-office officials working out the details of the possible agreement. I was the lead person in this. We spent hours discussing the issues that would be raised and what their common strategy would be. Our main aim was not to tell them what position to take or what kind of agreement to sign, but to ensure that they both had the same position in the interest of expediting the process of independence.

Though I was with them most of the time during this critical week, there were lots of other minds in the Foreign Office discussing options and possible disagreements in crucial areas where common positions were required. Because of our efforts and the cooperation of the two leaders the Lancaster House Agreement went well and both leaders came out satisfied with the terms. The agreements reached were:

- to abide by the Independence Constitution
- to abide by arrangements for the pre-independence period

- to have both parties sign a ceasefire agreement
- to accept the outcome of a free and fair election ²

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I had seen Nyerere speaking at the OAU during my tenure as deputy foreign minister, but one moment when Nyerere and I met in his private house has stuck in my mind. It was in the heat of the Ethio-Somali war and the Red and White Terrors were raging in our country. Mengistu dispatched me with a message to the president of Tanzania, looking for support. The Tanzanian ambassador to Ethiopia, Paul Rupiah, a good friend of Ethiopia, went ahead of me to organize the meeting. I went to Dar and stayed in Hotel Kilimanjaro, the only good hotel with conference facilities. ³⁹

While I was waiting for Ambassador Rupiah to come and take me to the president, he called to tell me there would be a delay and that he would come in an hour. He later told me that the president had to go to the airport to see President Ratsiraka of Madagascar who was transiting on his way back to his home. A little later, Ambassador Rupiah told me that the president had called and told him to take me to his private residence and wait for him there. Now there was no need for him to do this—I could have waited a day if he had wished. But *Mwalimu* wanted to make sure we would meet as he had arranged, and that I was kept informed. That’s the kind of man he was. I was surprised to be asked to come to his own home

I met Samora Machel at OAU and other international conferences. I also met him twice for a private discussion in Maputo, Mozambique after independence. These meetings gave me a thorough insight into the man—his passion, his energy and his commitment to the true independence of all countries in Africa. There is no country in Africa that suffered as much as Mozambique in the struggle for Zimbabwe’s independence because the base of the military operation by ZANU forces was in Mozambique.

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The assassination of Thomas Sankara was a tragedy shrouded in mystery because as it turns out, his killer was the same man who took over power: his close friend and second-in-command, Capt. Blaise Compaoré. During his reign he suppressed any information about Sankara’s death and it was only years later that the truth started to emerge. In the month when I arrived in Monrovia for my new job in 2008 the headline news in the Liberian papers was all about the death of Sankara, 21 years previously. Prince Johnson and Liberian mercenaries who were in Burkina Faso plotting a coup in their own country carried out the assassination. Johnson reported:

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Eritrea

Eritrea has always been in my heart. Having lived and worked there for so many years I have developed a sense of a strong attachment to the people whom I love and respect honestly. The fact that I worked and fought for the maintenance of the unity of Ethiopia and Eritrea does not diminish my bonding with the people. After all, there were also many Eritreans who fought for unity and stood with me. Some of the fathers, brothers and sisters of people who are now in power in Eritrea, fought also for unity, politically and militarily. This does not make them any lesser Eritreans. Many such kinds of people now live in Eritrea at peace with themselves and the government. As an Ethiopian with unique experience on Ethio-Eritrean relationship before independence, Eritrea has been and continues to be part of my adult life. This personal feeling and relationship with the people and the country is still fully alive and has thrived over the years. I have therefore discussed Eritrea at length not for political reasons but for historical reasons. Eritrean officials have always been modest, civil and very cooperative during the many encounters I had after I left Ethiopia. I understand that some of the points I raise in this book regarding the history of Eritrea's independence could be challenged. I want it to be taken as an academic argument rather than a political statement. Read it fully including the appendix and if you believe I am wrong. I invite you to do it in writing and based on research as I did.

In the end, Eritrea won its independence through enormous sacrifice on both sides, and Ethiopians have fully accepted the reality and only look forward to a peaceful coexistence. It is indeed one of the paradoxes of history that Eritrea is now fighting alongside Ethiopian forces for the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Genuine Ethiopians are indeed indebted to these difficult decisions taken by the Government of Eritrea which required the understanding of mutual interest for peace in the region.

“Eritrea: The Referendum for Independence: Was It Legal?”

From 1962 fast forward to 1991. Did the transitional government established by the EPRDF have the right to grant independence to Eritrea? There is no doubt that the EPLF would have had immediate international recognition if it had declared independence at the time it captured Asmara in 1991. There would have been no Ethiopian government then to challenge it. At that moment the TPLF was not yet fully in control of the country and was completely reliant on the EPLF to consolidate its power. Though the London agreement in principle outlined the terms and conditions of an independence process, the EPLF could have ignored that and simply issued a unilateral declaration of independence.

Did Ethiopia Colonize Eritrea?

This section of the book was added at the last minute. It was provoked by a retweet from Ambassador Beyene Russom, the Eritrean ambassador to the Republic of Kenya whom I know personally and have great respect. The tweet claimed that Ethiopia was a colonizer of Eritrea. I normally don't comment on tweeters although I do tweet articles I occasional write. I would

have said nothing had the sender been a non-official, but when an ambassador retweets something, it means it is the official version of the Eritrean government. I made a polite but firm comment stating that it was not correct to categorize Eritrea as a colony of Ethiopia....

Federal Arrangement

Ethiopia accepted the federal arrangement as a difficult compromise made under complex geopolitical pressures. Two days after the adoption of Resolution 390 by the UN General Assembly, the Emperor stated that the federal formula “does not entirely satisfy the wishes of the vast majority of the Eritreans who seek union without condition, nor does it satisfy all the legitimate claims of Ethiopia” and added that he accepted it because it was the only formula “that could obtain the necessary two- third majority for approval by the United Nations”⁸¹ Indeed, since Italy had been behind the push for Eritrean independence that led to the federation compromise, many in Ethiopia, thwarted in their desire for complete reunion, saw federation as “a concession to the dictates of pre-war Fascism. It was a Fascist formula which, at all costs, must be undone.”⁸²

There have been many comments on this federation resolution and many reasons have been given as to why the vote went the way it did. When all is said and done it doesn't matter. Whichever way the vote went, motives would have been questioned. These kinds of resolutions never please everybody. But in the end they become the international law when the majority passes them. That is how international agreements are reached. Ethiopian officials at the time heaped blame on certain countries because unification was rejected, but federation won the day. The important thing to note is that by 1950 the Eritrean independence block was fragmented and many members had defected to the Unionist Party. The Italians had been one of the main supporters of independence, but now they abandoned that position and at that point there was no serious challenge to federation.

The federation was a turning point that changed the politics of the region and indeed of the world. Much has been written about the lead-up to federation and the decade that followed, some of it propaganda to bolster the claims of one side or the other. I have written extensively in *Red Tears* and then in *Kihdet be Dem Meret* on what transpired during the era of the federation, why and how the independence movements started and the wars were fought. My accounts were by no means exhaustive. Even more information has come to light since Eritrea's independence. I advise students on Eritrea and its long journey to independence to refer to many other books and documents that have been published since and before independence. Ato Zewdie Retta's book *Ye Ertra Guday (Matters Regarding Eritrea)* written in Amharic is the most authoritative on what transpired after the Second World War up to the point of federation.⁸³ There is also a documentary study by Habtu Ghebre-Ab titled *Ethiopia and Eritrea*.⁸⁴ Habtu has done an excellent job of compiling all relevant documents on the case of Eritrea after World War II. Another book I recommend is *Ethiopia at Bay* written by John Spencer who attended almost all the meetings at the UN on Eritrea. Finally, *Unionists and*

Separatists by Shumet Sishagne has an enormous number of references to what actually happened in the United Nations, in Eritrea, and within the Ethiopian government concerning Eritrea from 1941 to 1991. ⁸⁵

All the information is out there. Let the propaganda to justify the war for independence yield to the truth now that everything is over. Let us put the history of these two peoples in proper perspective guided by reliable evidence and use that information to come up with a brighter future for our two countries. To do that, we must mention several additional aspects of the chain of events that culminated in the independence of Eritrea.

Eritrea's War was for Self Determination

Those who want to argue about whether the war was legal or illegal based on the right to self-determination should be aware of a paradox in international law: a struggle for self-determination can be judged legitimate only if the separatists succeed. In other words, once the demand for self-determination by a group within a state becomes a revolution, the right of self-determination that they claim is recognized internationally only if the revolution is successful.

In the case of Eritrea, the struggle was legitimate in hindsight because the EPLF was successful, but that does not make the 30-year war legal under international law. When Eritrea decided to exercise national self-determination to separate from Ethiopia it gained international legitimacy only when the facts on the ground dictated its success and the EPLF came out victorious. They won the war and their independence. Nobody can take that away from the Eritrean struggle.

In cases of secession it is less a question of right than success or failure.¹⁴³ The inevitable conclusion is that secession forms no part of the concept of self-determination and its revolutionary character derives legally only in success.¹⁴.....The Eritrean struggle succeeded because it gradually gained the support of the great majority of its people and was also able to mobilize the sentiments of some segments of the international community and those who had a vested interest in the cause of the Eritrean people. It succeeded because it was able over time to organize a formidable force while at the same time the Mengistu regime was failing to get the continued support of the people to continue its reckless conduct of this war. The issues discussed above do not make this resounding success any the less deserving but history must be put in proper perspective. The EPLF won the war. The TPLF did not.

Abrogation of the Federal Act

“After lengthy discussions (with Foreign Minister Aklilu) the impasse was resolved: They assured us that an agreement was indeed involved; one exclusively between Ethiopia and the Eritrean Assembly. That very fact divested the UN of all further jurisdiction in the federation. If at some time in the future, the Eritrean Assembly and Ethiopia agree to terminate that agreement, the federation itself would be automatically dissolved without any possible

recourse or objection by the United Nations.⁹⁴ This final formula was transmitted without change to the interim committee and it was also submitted without change to the fifth session of the General Assembly, which passed Resolution 390"

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The truth will only make us stronger in pursuing our common interests. Emotions must subside and give way to pragmatism. We have to work very closely with our Eritrean brothers and sisters to establish a new era of peaceful co-existence and common prosperity that will lead to a reunion of our people. This must start from the streets, the restaurants, the clubs, churches and various forums in Ethiopia, Eritrea, America, and Africa. President Isaias while visiting Ethiopia apologized for some of the political rhetoric the EPLF used during the 30-year war, particularly in demonizing the Amharas. That is a commendable start.

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On Prime Minister Abiy

“The Great Impostor:

When I was a boy, I remember watching a movie titled *The Great Imposter*.^{*} Back then I took it as a very funny movie. After so many decades I remembered only the title and the fact that it was a comedy so in writing this chapter I looked for it and watched it again and read about the character. It was apparently based on the life of a man called Ferdinand Waldo Demara played by one of my favorite actors, Tony Curtis, who stars in the incredible but true story of the world’s greatest big-time impostor of that era.....

In the euphoria that overwhelmed the country, people did not bother to find out who he is and was. What was important then in 2018 was that the TPLF was being driven out and Abiy Ahmed’s promised changes. But Abiy had been raised and groomed by the TPLF since That should have been a tipoff to anyone thinking about what the future would hold.

.....Many have found out that Abiy Ahmed has proved to be an egocentric fraud whose only aim was the prize: the throne. Previous leaders have been deceptive too. Mengistu, and Meles both fooled the country at first with their public personae, but Abiy Ahmed goes beyond that. He deserves to be called “The Great Impostor.”

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Perhaps he is not so much an impostor as a sophist, as one commentator recently suggested.⁷⁹⁰ The sophists were those men in ancient Greece who were good with words and could twist them whichever way they wanted to win an argument, playing on an audience’s emotion without any concern for the truth.

One thing is becoming clearer as we try to understand him: he is a narcissist and it is generally narcissists who become impostors. If they get into a leadership role, they believe that they alone know what is best, that everyone should trust them, that they can save the day. When

narcissists become impostors, they become complicated people with a constant fear of failing or being exposed. Those fears can drive them to the extreme, leading them to act irrationally, contrary to common sense. They keep on lying, telling contradicting stories about themselves as they try to project a different image.

Ethiopia has seen leaders of all kinds in the past, but they were not con artists. Our leaders, with all their weaknesses and faults, held firmly to the idea of Ethiopian unity and were predictable. History might describe each one of them as kings or emperors but always as leaders with empathy and a full sense of patriotism. Not much is known about this man called Abiy Ahmed who just jumped into the political scene, but we do know that in no more than a year since he became prime minister in 2018 he has acted more and more like a dictator around whom the future of Ethiopia revolves.

This is an impostor, a charlatan, and a man who is entirely focused on himself. He has no time to think about the people, even the victims of the most heinous crimes in Ethiopian history.

But since then, the signs are that he is heading down the road of previous authoritarian governments by clinging to the disastrous ethnic policies of his predecessors. He is ambitious and wants to fulfill his mother's prophecy that he would rule the country as the "seventh king of Ethiopia."

When the talk turns to kings, what comes to mind is the image from Shakespeare of Macbeth, full of self-doubt, unsure about taking the violent steps necessary to kill the king of Scotland and seize the crown for himself:

I have no spur To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself, And falls on th'other [side] ."

(*Macbeth* Act I, scene 7)

The End.

Start Reading the book before making comments. It is detailed based on empirical research.

The Book is very long, and I don't expect people to finish reading the entire book. But it has detailed table of contents and therefore readers can choose a topic that interests them. The books are being shipped from South Africa where it is printed to the USA. It has been three months since it has been given to the shippers. Hope it will arrive in the USA in two weeks. I will post the places where interested people can find the book. It is already in Europe and being distributed beginning next week.

