

Where is the so-called ONLF, by the way?

The recent developmental success of the Somali Region of Ethiopia has refocused attention on the ONLF (Ogaden National Liberation Front) separatist movement that claims fighting for the independence of the Somali region of the eastern part of Ethiopia since 1982.

During its early years, the ONLF enjoyed higher popularity among the Somali people because of the legitimate grievances of the Somali people, who endured long lasting subjugation, recurring massacres, socio-economic abandonment and political exclusions from every sort of Ethiopian regime from centuries old imperialists to the self-styled socialist Derg regime. At first, the ONLF capitalized on these grievances of the local populace. But over these long years the ONLF has changed regarding its political as well as military strategies except its approach with the local populace which was based on intimidation, blackmailing, confiscation of household belongings; like livestock, food and water with a resulting disapproval. During the course of this struggle, which of course has passed through different stages, the insurgency has escalated the violence not only against the state – but also against the innocent civilians who have suffered more from the tactics of rebels than from the Ethiopian state.

This long conflict has costed thousands of lives. Though there are no exact figures and efforts to verify often ends in futility. I personally felt the brutality of this conflict and observed it first hand during a visit to Kebri Dehar five years ago which was one of the epicenters of the endless and fruitless conflict that marred the lives of so many innocent civilians.

During that short spell in Kebri Dehar, I joined the funeral of a young Liyou Police Force member and visited another injured one. On that same occasion I got a chance to talk to a captured insurgent who was also injured who told me that many of his other rebel members were also killed in this last battle in which he was fortunate enough not to be among those who have fallen on that faithful day. I was



personally touched by these events and the other countless horror stories that I heard throughout the years and has changed my outlook and understanding of the senseless conflict.

While the insurgency has lost the momentum it has reached since the years that run up to the famous Obole incident in which the lives of nine Chinese nationals, number of Ethiopian soldiers, local government militias and of course countless civilian lives were lost. This horrendous conflict has rendered the Somali Region; which is rich in minerals, oil and gas, extra-ordinary water and land resources as well as other natural resources, useless for quite some time.

However, the trajectory of the region turned around quickly seven years ago in which the Somali Regional government embarked on a set of security reforms intended to purge the ONLF sleeper cells and their sympathizers off of the civil service and security apparatus in which they infiltrated and incapacitated for a quite long time.

These efforts were led by the current Somali Regional President Abdi Mohamoud Omer who was in charge of the regional security and justice portfolio at the time and culminated in the strategic decision to establish the Somali Regional Paramilitary Force, also known as the Liyou Police, that also made obsolete the long standing argument and recruitment tool of the insurgency that they are fighting the Ethiopian military which is a foreign occupying force. Now they have to face a fearless, well trained and well-equipped local force that knows the people and the terrain better than they do not to mention their dedication and commitment to set the people free of the grip of violence and desperation brought up-on the people by the cowardly rebels.

As if that was not only enough, the Somali Regional Government with the support of the Federal Government has made a collective and conscious decision to put in place a set of institutional reforms and developmental agenda that will go side by side with the security measures and policies to get rid-off this malignant cancer once and for all that impeded the socio-economic well-being of the Somali people. And it's the last couple of years that this strategic leadership and dedication bear fruit. The current level of activities in rebuilding the infrastructure; such as dams, schools, hospitals, roads, electricity supplies etc. are living testimonies for that long strive for change.

The Somali people are freedom, peace and development loving people. They would fight relentlessly with any force that threatens their freedom and peace. That is why they resisted colonization and subjugation of any kind for more than a century. And they finally overcome an internal enemy to peace and development by setting an ambitious and organic agenda for peace and development that's led by their sons and daughters of the Somali Region and fueled by grassroots movement for change and progress. Thanks in

part to the current Regional Government leadership specially, that of President Abdi Mohamud Omar.

The take away from all this is that the current socioeconomic development efforts that the region has embarked on as well as accelerated in the last seven years and spear headed by the visionary and strong leadership of the current Regional Government headed by President Abdi Mohamud Omar that shut the door on the last remaining pockets of resistance and rendered the whole insurgency and their misguided idea useless and worthless for good.



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