

Is This Really About the Martyr's Monument?

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Recently 'FACT' magazine, in its February 2006: issue 34 publication, have put out an article by Tewodros T/Aregay under the title 'How old is the Defense force or army?' What served as an 'inspiration' for this article was; the emotional roller coaster that followed the laying of cornerstone for the construction of the first ever National Martyrs' Monument on the premises of 'Tor Hailoch', to be build to honor and glorify the martyrs that had lost their lives in the name of peace, development and democracy.

This occasion was held in the recent celebration of the second Army's day. Thus, in this article I will try to counter the writers (it would be more fitting to call him the 'unknowing critique') empty and emotion-ridden article that's done with complete disregard to the truth.

As it's known, when one is faced with the question 'How old is the Defense force?' issue like 'which regime's Defense force or army?' is he talking about, will first come to our mind. Nevertheless, if the question 'How old is the Defense force or army?' is asked, it's obvious that it means from the time when a regular army that defends and protects the country from attacks was established.

However, it's appropriate to understand that there are distinctive traits that are associated with each regime's army. So, considering this, it's not that hard to pinpoint the age of our country's military force. This is because it's obvious that our military force, in order to protect and defend our country's sovereignty, it has long been (since early times) sacrificing its precious life to

defend its borders and to answer generational question of peace, development and democracy.

So, I think it's easy to estimate that the military's age is not that different from the country's age. The fact that we commemorate the Adwa victory, that lamented the indomitability of black people, and the fact that we celebrate a victory that many sons of our people sacrificed their lives for are a testament to this fact.

However, the 'FACT' Magazine's Ato Tewodros out of a wrong and narrow-minded outlook has criticized the monument that's to be erected to commemorate the sacrifice and valor of sons of our people who raised their arms to stop the misery and despair of our country's nation, nationalities and people and those who lost their lives for their country following in the footsteps of them.

I believe this would-be writer hosts an extremely biased outlook which on top of his information deficiencies', it has led him to write a contradictory article. Although it's not clear what made this man angry about seeing a cornerstone being laid for the members of FDRE defense forces who sacrificed their lives for peace, development and democratic order building, by citing he has watched the ceremony through television, he have concluded that the dictatorial and the killer Derg army are not in it. The fact that its pure hatred that's led him to this conclusion can easily be understood from the many contradicting issues he stated in his article.

Of course with this Ato Tewodros have forgotten the martyrs who paid with their lives to have him the right to access information and write whatever comment he wants in a peaceful environment without looking at his back.

Looking at it like any other citizen, the fact that this man tried to present distorted information by disregarding the truth, not only shows the contempt he has for the readers, but his bias towards the issue. All in all, let us move to discuss the Derg regime military force ...

According to the fact-laden criticism of the writer, when the cornerstone was laid during the celebration of the second FDRE army day, to commemorate sons of the people who died in the name of their people and country, he claimed that he didn't see former member of the military that served their country during the 'Derg' regime in it.

I believe this is the same as saying that the former member of the military did not join the current FDRE Defense force. But, I don't think this man have any idea about what he's talking about.

I say this because at the time when the FDRE defense force was being established under proclamation 27/1988 with equitable representation of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia, there were many members of the Derg army who accepted the call of the government to join the army, and that are still in the service.

If Ato Tewodros claims to be he's working as a 'journalist' or 'writer', he should have, at least the courtesy to thoroughly investigate and understand this reality from the concerned entities.

However, as his objective is to spread any unconfirmed rumor as the truth, like every other extremists, he shouldn't be condemned for doing the article. In fact had he written by verifying the facts, it would have been rejected by

‘FACT’ magazine which is runned by the likes of Ato Temesgen Desalegn’s “messianic” editorial policy.

Here, I want it to be understood that I am not saying all member of the former military forces have joined the new defense forces. As it’s known, the dictatorial Derg regime had established a huge army, which reached up to half a million soldiers, as a result of its siege-oriented ‘we are surrounded by our enemies’ foreign policy.

So, it was impossible for the new EPRDF forces to fully accept this military force, which at the time was ahead of all of black African armies; especially considering it also inherited an empty cash vault. Our economy can’t possible sustain it (the huge army). This has led it to include those members of the former military that gave their consent to work for their country.

Therefore, it should be understood that these members, after they were instilled with ‘pro-people’ trait, they are currently carrying out their constitutional duty with a strong commitment, whilst keeping their former ranks and benefits.

In fact, had it not been to Ato Tewodros’ desire to bring about fact-laden information, it would have been easy to know that these members of the army have been and still are majorly contributing on modern army building process that is currently being undertaken by the defense force, by sharing their experience they gained from their former exploits in the military world.

All in all, seeing his ludicrous comment, “it has been seen that the ‘pro-people’ attitude of the ‘Derg’ army being tossed out like a garbage”, gives us

an understanding on how bad this man wants to blacken the current FDRE military force.

Before I delve into countering this gargantuan lie, I have found it to be necessary to touch up on the establishment & organization of the Ethiopian military forces, and their founding traits with respect to their respective regimes.

Although it's not exactly known the exact date when a regular military was established in Ethiopia, it's believed that it was during Emperor Tewodros reign. This was from 1847 up to 1864. Historical documents tell us that Emperor Tewodros have been able to make three basic changes on the army, by taking various experiments from the westerns.

One of those changes was opening technical school at 'Gafat' and starting open training, to equip the army with technical knowledge. The second was the building of a large artillery mortar called 'Sebastopol' driven by the desire to equip the army with modern weaponry, along with the effort to build weapons warehouse at Meqdela. And the third has to do with an effort to arrange the army's organization in order to help it have a structured shape.

These starts by making the army have a salary and rank system; they had created a suitable environment for a professional fraternization (interaction between soldiers of different ranks) code to flourish within the army. At that time, following the start of salary payment, the soldiers not only started to give due respect with regards to the profession, but it also stopped its former ways in which (the emperor's soldier) took away the farmer's grain. After the death of Emperor Tewodros, Emperor Yohannes ruled over

Ethiopia from 1864 up to 1881, in which he played his own constructive role by making the army organization that was started during Emperor Tewodros to continue.

In 1881, after Emperor Yohannes was killed on the fight against the mahdists, Emperor Menelik came to power. And it's believed that, it was during his reign that Ethiopian army put on a military uniform for the first time.

The other additional change was the fact that war ministry was one of the first ministry posts that was established in 1908, when the first cabinet ministries were set up. It can be said that this action is a huge undertaking that moved the army's establishment into another level.

After Emperor Menelik won over the huge army of fascist Italy along with its modern weaponry when they came to invade us by mobilizing and leading the whole Ethiopian people, he became the pride of not only our country but our black African brothers and sisters. And our country has put up statues to Emperor Menelik and to the brave patriots at various places in the country.

In Ethiopia's military history, the first well-functioning army was the army that was used to be known as 'imperial guard/Kibur Zebegna'. The objective (mission) of this army; which is first conceived by Ras Teferi during his regency days, was to protect Ras Teferi.

After Emperor Hailesillasie's iron-rule on the Ethiopian people intensified, the 'Derg' military junta used this as a pretext to come to power in 1966 through a coup-de-eta. Emperor Hailesellasié during his reign has built

many statues in the capital and regional states that glorified both the king and the order.

The 'Derg' dictatorial junta had a huge army both in quantity and quality of weapon it was equipped with. But it was hugely degraded in its ethical capacity. It can be recalled that the regime has killed more than half a million people under the bloody campaign of 'Red Terror' just to retain its hold on power.

The regime's brutal butchery that was carried out in different parts of our country in order to put down the public's demand forcefully, and how it saw the people as its enemy is still fresh in the memories of our people.

Not only the Derg army is known for its butchery, but the regime also had built many statues that glorified the regime during its reign. Out of those statues, the 'Dilachen/our victory' statue that's situated around Black Lion Hospital is one.

What we can understand from these facts is, despite the past regime's respective (positive) role with regards to military force organization and army profession; their actions were only intended on executing their respective Emperors' and dictators' wishes, they did not represent the people nor its wishes.

In fact I don't think saying their main principle was 'anti-people' will be far from the truth. And these facts will led us (to what I promised I will look into on this article) to the whole Ato Tewdros's "Derg's army 'pro-people' attitude was tossed away like garbage" comment. Dear Readers! On what kind of twisted opposition calculation, this so-called writer shamelessly

came out and said that the Derg army is ‘pro-people’, I have no idea ... may be for him the more than half a million people that perished under the army and regime are at fault for this?...

The fact that Ato Tewodros, in his effort to blacken the FDRE defense forces; that answered the people’s generational demand of peace, development and democracy, called an army that spilled its citizen’s blood like a flood; an army that inflicted heavy and misery and pain in every Ethiopian homes; and an army that used to make people pay for its bullet after it killed, as a “pro-people” shows the deep contempt he have for the people. Also it shows his heavily distorted outlook with regards to people, and what being ‘pro-people’ means, including the fact that he is a ‘Derg–apologist’.

All in all, even if it pains the man the so-called ‘lions’ of the ‘Derg’ were defeated by the children of our people; who are know the nucleus of the FDRE defense forces, through their sacrifice, ‘pro-people’ attitude and iron–fist commitment and the support of the Ethiopian people.

And after the demise of ‘Derg’ the whole Ethiopian nation, nationalities and people have created the necessary peaceful environment which will enable them establish a new political, social and economic community.

And through their consent together they have ratified a constitution that can be a base for the creation of a joint political, economic and social community. With it, they have created the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

In February 7, 1988 a defense force that would protect the country’s sovereignty; that represents equitable representation of the nation,

nationalities and people and a force that's functions free of any partisanship to any political organization(s) and have a strong 'pro-people' outlook.

Here I would like to advice Ato Tewdros about what "pro-people" really means; seeing as how he's confused about the concept so much that he's also confusing others. I will do this by taking a closer look at the FDRE defense force.

This is because he will then realize that this army sacrifices itself before the people and country; this army has a wholesome personality at anytime; that it has an unwavering and uncompromised democratic outlook and that it's victorious in any given situation and time with a minimal cost.

He can also take into account the testament given with regards to peacekeeping operations both by the African Union and UN citing on the army's neutral and equal view it has towards all humans regardless of color and race, both domestically and internationally.

Thus, I think it's important to remind Ato Tewodros about the fact that 'pro-people' army means, an army that respect civilians in any condition and sacrifice itself for the people. This is because it will help him understand that being a 'pro-people' army is not about doing the exact opposite, whilst being engulfed with a dictatorial syndrome; which was what the former regime's army exactly used to do.

Although this person doesn't want to see the hard facts, inevitably he will be judged by the country of the public opinion. This is because the public has witnessed firsthand for the sinister acts and butchery that was carried out

by the Derg regime, while he and his likes are heaping compliments like 'pro-people' to it in public.

Dear Readers! When Ato Tewodros made us read his article 'How old is the army?' on 'FACT' magazine, he really didn't say which regime's defense he meant. As I have tried to mention it earlier, the defense armies that were build in each regime have their own distinctive traits, including not siding with the public.

However, the man has amazingly asked 'Didn't the former army protect our sovereignty when our country was invaded by Siad Barre's troops? So mustn't this new army monument include that army?' of course it can't be said that every army at their respective regime didn't carry out its duty of protecting our country from foreign invading forces since the days of our forefathers.

So, if it isn't his mind playing tricks on his mind, there isn't one who will say that the defense forces that were established on any of the regime didn't protect our country from invaders and aggressors. And I don't think there will be one in the future.

Thus despite the fact that the 'Derg' army was established through anti-people traits, it had protected our country from Siad Barre. This is an undeniable truth. However, the monument that was to be erected on the premises of what is now referred as 'Tor Hailoch' has nothing to do with it.

This is because that army was fighting to elongate the duration the 'Derg' regime stay in power and not for answering the people's age old demand for peace, development and democracy. So, it will be appropriate to know the

This army took over from the transitional government army that was trying to maintain peace and stability and laid a suitable condition for development. After the transitional army carried out its mission of bringing peace and stability to the country, the FDRE national defense force was established officially by the representatives of the people, with a duty to protect the country's peace and the country's democratic order from being repealed, and to guarantee sustainable development.

This shows the fact that the FDRE defense forces took over this new Ethiopia of which it's founded upon the consent of the people, out of the peace, development and democratic groundwork that has been laid by the transitional army; it's not from the former army as this would-be writer assumed.

The one that took over the country from the former army is the EPRDF forces, not FDRE military forces. But, be that as it may, trying to distort the fact that the military force did not take over the country from the peace, development and democratic groundwork, and instead claiming it was from the brutal 'Derg' (which is what this 'Derg-apologist' is trying to say) will amount to nothing.

Although the issues Ato Tewodros raised in his article contradicts each other and are thrown in there to blacken the FDRE military force image, I don't to delve into it anymore as I have seen these kinds of issues from the hate-mongering oppositions.

So, I would like to finish by raising one fact. That is it doesn't take any fancy calculation to find the exact age of our army. Because everybody knows that it's been eighteen years since the army's establishment; in

which it includes an unbelievable valorous struggle to maintain the unprecedented economic growth and uphold long lasting peace. Therefore, our army is always ready and alert to uphold its constitutional duty, to make the anti-poverty struggle successful and guarantee our path to renaissance.