

Overcoming Challenges in Forming a FANO Unified Command

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April 2, 2024

That the Abiy regime is not a force for positive change and needs to be replaced is a foregone conclusion. There are those that insist that the replacement should be done either through elections or/and other robust civil disobedience. There are also Ethiopians that have resolved that the only reliable method of replacement is through armed resistance given the regime's intransigence.

Both methods may feed off each other, while the armed struggle seems to be the sure gate to get to the goal. Given the goal of forming an inclusive transitional government to pave the way for a united, democratic and peaceful Ethiopia, FANO appears to be the premier engine and the nucleus to effectuate such change. To that effect, we will proffer some ideas that would help empower FANO to carry out this responsibility of historic proportion. A Unified Command encompassing the 4 Amhara provinces (and hopefully beyond) is a prerequisite to fulfil this responsibility. Although their decentralized military operations have given them leeway to implement successful strategy and tactics, a Unified Command is essential and would add tremendous value to the struggle.

What are the possible challenges that need to be overcome to achieve a Unified Command?

THE ROLE OF EGO IN LEADERSHIP

The literature on this subject mainly addresses the role of a leader's ego in a business environment. An egotist manager in a business may be responsible for huge losses for the company and for good people leaving the company. Our focus here is ego's role in a battlefield environment among guerrilla forces that are striving to forge unity. "Ego, in psychological terms, refers to the conscious sense of self and identity that a person holds. It encompasses one's perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves, often shaped by experiences, social interactions, and cultural influences" [1].

Some define ego as a “sense of superiority and certainty that exceeds the bounds of confidence and talent” [2]. This means there is a healthy ego that a leader may possess exuding confidence and talent, and that realizes that others may have also the same talent. A leader with an inflated ego prioritizes personal goals over organizational goals, resists feedback because he/she thinks he knows everything, and he engages in unethical behavior such as in recruiting and cultivating loyal followers. This results in a leader engaging in misuse of power. In summation, egotists have a dangerous belief in their own importance. Some suggest that emotional intelligence goes a long way to manage an unhealthy ego. For FANO leaders an abiding humility based on *ኢትዮጵያዊ ጩዋነት*, and the “*አንተ ትብሰኛ አንተ ትብሰኛ*,” culture of caring for a co-leader may be the key ingredients to suppress an unhealthy ego.

As an illustration of ego’s damaging results, one of EPRP’s leaders, Birhane Meskel Redda, was a great revolutionary that gave his life for the Ethiopian people. However, many, not all, insiders believe that when the 1975 party extended conference decided to abolish his secretary general position, he seemed to have been deeply offended by the decision, and gradually hardened his position against those CC members, taking political positions different from theirs, to the extent of arguing in the end of making peace with the Dergue and finally splitting the party.

Some Ethiopians in the Diaspora have made the community proud by establishing and running institutions that have been reputable and durable. Two examples include the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America that started out as a soccer competition association and gradually grew to be a powerful sports and cultural force that Ethiopians in the Diaspora and their progeny look upon with pride and attend the annual festivities in great numbers and with enthusiasm. The other is the Ethiopian Community Association in Chicago that started out as a local community organization that grew to be an admired and competent magnet of assistance for refugees coming to Chicago from all over the world.

These organizations have achieved so much success because of the humility, dedication and cooperative spirit of the founders and the successive leaders. By contrast, the most recent appointment by two FANO leaders of two separate FANO fund raising committees (and sadly more to come) in the Diaspora is symptomatic of the long way FANO must go to form One Unified Command.

Democratic societies have developed over the years institutions and tradition to restrain leadership egos: constitutions with checks and balances, courts to adjudicate

controversies and a relatively enlightened electorate. Even with these, the system sometimes gets severely tested by people like Trump.

ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AS A MEASURE OF LEADERSHIP

In modern societies, the level and relevance of one's education have been keys to being hired and promoted in a job. In the battlefield too, those with various educational levels are necessary for the overall success of the guerrilla warfare, and more so, in the post-conflict era. However, the battlefield offers opportunities of leadership for those that have not attained higher educational level so long as they show courage, earn the trust of their comrades and are hardworking. The battlefield gives political and military opportunities that cannot be replicated in the classroom.

There have been, of late, reports besmirching some FANO commanders as having no higher education, the implication being that they are not fit to be leaders. This is wrong. There are at least two examples of such "little educated" leaders that the Tigrean and Eritrean struggles produced. Prof. Gebru Tareke, in his book, "The Ethiopian Revolution" [3], tells us of one Hadush Araya, nom de guerre, Hayelom Araya. Hayelom completed high school in Adwa, but failed to get the grades for university entrance. He was unsuccessfully looking for a job in Addis when the Yekatit Revolution broke out. He joined the TPLF in 1975 and quickly made a name for himself as a courageous fighter, growing from company leader to division leader in short order. One female TPLF fighter who served under him described him as a small man with a lion's heart and voice (he was 5'5"). When he died, he was a Major General of TPLF.

Then there is Mesfin Hagos, a man who barely completed grade 8 when he joined the Eritrean resistance. He was a successful military strategist during the Eritrean struggle. After Eritrea achieved its independence, he held various positions, including a one-time Defense Minister. Mesfin has recently published an autobiographical book where he describes the current Eritrean regime as a dictatorship, and the efforts he made to correct President Isayas's autocratic path [4].

FANO: STATE CONSOLIDATING OR STATE SUBVERTING INSURGENCY?

Christopher Clapham, in his “African Guerrillas” book [5], broadly classifies African guerrillas as state consolidating or state subverting. Among the former EPRDF, Rwanda Patriotic Front and EPLF are cited as insurgencies that took over the state and consolidated it. Others, such as the ones in Somalia, DRC and Liberia, tore down the state and anarchy ensued, thus subverting the existing state. Typically, what happens is as follows: the state fights one or more rebels at the same time, and it loses. The rebels fight amongst themselves, and they have offsprings. The war becomes multi-faceted and gets worse than it was before.

From all the attributes of FANO, it does not appear that FANO will be a state subverting insurgency. However, in order to preempt the possible emergence of inflated egos, divisions and subdivisions within the FANO struggle, a couple of practical suggestions taken from other struggles may be worth considering.

When EPLF (or more correctly its 3 components- Ala Group, Obel and PLF) fragmented from ELF in 1967, it took them about 5 years to form one solid organization called EPLF in October 1972 [6]. Unlike FANO, they had a small number (a combined 500). They formed a 57-member executive committee headed by a 9-member administrative, day-to-day body whose chairmanship rotated among the three. If the issue of a single chairmanship becomes a controversial issue with FANO, the idea of a rotating chairman may be codified in their bylaws to overcome the challenge.

The role of *ሽማግሌዎች*, an indigenous tradition, could be institutionalized at a grand scale to have advisory or legislative role. Not only would this democratize the military institution, but also would involve the representative of the masses as decision making body. Already, experience in Gonder and Shewa FANO has resulted in the formation of bodies called *የሰላይ ጠባቂ*. Taking an example from our neighbor during the height of the Somali civil war, the Somaliland clan elders called Gurrti among the Isaaq were influential in raising resources from the clan, although their role was advisory. The clan elders are still heavyweights as seen in the recent charade of the Abiy regime in his false claim of obtaining *የጨረቃ* port there. Moreover, from Somalia, the Islamic Courts Union that lasted from 2004-06 there, formed a 91-member body called the *Shura*, which was a legal body through which grievances against the leadership could be aired. The ICU was led by a 15-member executive council and a 91-member legislative *Shura* [7].

With these additional democratic bodies, FANO could play a pivotal role as a state consolidating force in collaboration with allies and stakeholders. The guerrilla movements we cite here solve oftentimes their leadership choice issues by arranging for an organizational Congress where proportional representation plays a key role. This works efficiently for top-down organizations where the leaders at the top know exactly the number of units and the number of fighters in each unit. In the case of a bottom-up organization like FANO, only the local chieftains know their units and fighters. So, proportional representation would demand a leap of faith and instead of solving the leadership choice, it might be a cause for friction.

FANO'S MOMENTARY DISADVANTAGE IN STRATEGIC MATTERS

Because FANO has not yet established a Unified Command, it has not been able so far to focus on strategic issues, such as laying out a grand military strategy, focused and persistent propaganda, a vision statement laying out its short term and long - term goals in terms of alliance, tasks and transition to peace. On the other hand, the Abiy regime has the luxury of engaging in disinformation, and propaganda. On the ground, the regime continuously harasses the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, demolishes old neighborhoods, and historical artifacts. The Wolkait-Tegede-Telemt Raya tinderbox is as hot as ever. TPLF once again seems not to tire of making momentous mistakes. Its recent probing provocations in Raya can only forebode misery to the people of the region including the much suffering Tigrean people.

The regime plans to pin down FANO forces to protect Ataye, a town regime forces had burnt down at least 9 times. It continues to collude with YouTube to suppress Ethiopianist opposition voices. The regime has its tentacles in many destructive activities, scheming and plotting as ever, including the episodic Amhara genocide in Wollega and Arsi.

When FANO forms its Unified Command, it would be on par with the regime and gradually moving on strategic offensive to complete victory. However, due to minor historical differences between the provinces and other issues cited herein, the slow pace of the formation of a Unified Command continues to be part of growing pain.

CONCLUSION

Despite FANO's spectacular military victories and growth in less than a year, the regime has not dared so far to extend an olive branch for talks. This is in stark contrast to the regime's offer to OLA. The OLA officially has held talks with the regime at least twice, including the aerial transport of its leader from the bushes. While this may be part of the regime's sinister divisive plans, it reminds us of what Isayas Afeworki told East German mediators in 1978 when they were trying to mediate between the Dergue and EPLF. Isayas told the unsuccessful mediators that in 17 years of the Eritrean struggle neither the Haileselassie regime nor the Dergue offered even once for talks [8]. 12 years later, the EPLF was victorious.

On a lighter note, the singer Dagne Walle continues to culturally mobilize the Amhara and other youth in his celebratory songs to FANO. In his latest song, called *ወንድ ልጅ ቆረጠ*, he pays tribute to FANO in a popular song. The only downside to the song is the title of the song valorizing only men. In FANO struggle, women like Tigist Chane', a Soma Brigade leader, Emebet Simegneu, a Finote Selam pregnant FANO who gave her life as a scout during a skirmish, Tinbit Hailemariam, a Shoa FANO women directorate leader, and of course the symbols of women resistance, Meskerem Abera, Genet Asmamaw and the like dominate. The title should have been gender neutral, such as *ጃግና ቆረጠ*. Hopefully, Dagne will make amends by composing a song honoring the sacrifices of our women.

In the final analysis, FANO would be judged by whether it helps introduce a clean break from the autocratic practices of the past and the present, the hallmarks of which have been genocide and internal displacements.

NOTES

1. [Linkedin.com/pulse/role-ego-leadership](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-ego-leadership), Carola Tribbe
2. [Kashboxcoaching.com/the-dangers-of-ego-in-leadership](https://www.kashboxcoaching.com/the-dangers-of-ego-in-leadership), Dr. Cherry Collier
3. *The Ethiopian Revolution- War in the HOA*, Gebru Tareke, Yale University Press, 2009, p.104-105
4. *An African Revolution Reclaimed*, Mesfin Hagos with ATWM, Red Sea Press, 2023
5. *African Guerrillas*, ed. By Christopher Clapham, Indiana University Press, 1998, p.15-16
6. *Insurgent Fragmentation in the HOA*, Michael Woldemariam, Cambridge University Press, 2020, p.153
7. *Ibid.*, p.243
8. *Ibid.*, p.176