



The Oromo Liberation Struggle at a Critical Cross-roads; The Need and Urgency of Unified Action

The political history of the Oromo liberation struggle reveals that the struggle has come a long way through tortuous path registering major milestones. Merely reckoning from early 70s, the epoch when a modern form of national struggle was launched, nearly four decades have gone by since the struggle was put on the fateful trajectory of an unambiguous objective: the objective of decolonizing and forming the independent state of Oromiyaa. During these decades, few landmark achievements have been scored. Much to the chagrin of the Oromo nation, however, the liberation struggle has progressively lost steam mainly over the last two decades. Today, leave alone achieving any further gain, the Oromo liberation struggle is at critical cross-roads where hard won gains are on the verge of eroding.

In the face of this reality, the Oromo nationalists are bewildered and seem to have lost a sense of political direction and the Oromo public is in utter dismay and pleading for a way out of the current political stalemate within the camp of the Oromo national liberation struggle.

The present state of the Oromo liberation camp

Presently, to put it bluntly, the Oromo liberation camp is in a state of debility. At a time when the liberation camp is expected to develop the most sophisticated organization and provide seasoned leadership that can weather through intricate political challenges of our time, we see it riddled with factions. This situation has arrested the organizational transformation of the liberation camp. It has brought about a fractured and degenerative leadership.

Here, in what we referred to as 'the liberation camp', two diametrically opposite phenomena are taking place. On one hand, consolidation is in the work. On the other, a progressive fracture is resulting. To better illuminate this dichotomy, we will be forced to name the names of organizations involved in this camp. In so doing, we will attempt to discuss and point out political challenges and parties responsible for sucking out the vital energy from this camp and reducing it to its present abysmal state.

As may be recalled, the 1990s epitomizes the mushrooming of Oromo political forces. At one time during the decade there were six fronts vowing to struggle for the freedom of the Oromo people. After nearly one decade of roller coaster in the unification effort, however, it had been successfully managed in bringing all of the fronts under one umbrella organization in the year 2000. The birth of this organization, the United Liberation Forces of Oromiyaa (ULFO), had ushered a new era when common sense prevailed among Oromo political leaders that led to an agreement on promoting the unity of purpose by putting aside minor political differences (real or perceived) and working for the greater good of liberating the nation. In this respect, the 2000 agreement, commonly referred to as The Oromo Consensus 2000, was a landmark achievement in the history of the Oromo national liberation struggle. This agreement was inviolable up until 2005 when the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) abrogated one of the core agreements: one that states that no member organization shall join an alliance of political entities whose objectives are at loggerhead with that of the Oromo liberation.

For the reason of reneging this watershed agreement, the OLF was dismissed from ULFO membership. The rest of member organizations have reaffirmed their commitments and embarked on advancing the unification process within ULFO; whereas the OLF has gravitated to seeking and forming alliance with non-Oromo political organizations. So truncated and polarized, the liberation camp has evolved, as stated earlier, in a diametrically opposite ways (the OLF on one hand and the remaining member organizations of ULFO on the other). In due course, organizations in the latter have merged and transformed ULFO from an umbrella organization to one political entity. The OLF on the other hand has devolved into three fragmented entities.

This is the contour of the present reality of the state of the Oromo liberation camp. Divided and lacking a coherent leadership, Oromo nationalists in this camp have miserably failed in putting their house in order and advancing the cause of our nation. While all Oromo nationalists do bear the blame individually, collectively however the blame for the crisis within the liberation camp rests, primarily if not squarely, on the OLF of all stripes/ suffixes. We thrust this assertion won't be construed as a partisan charge. The intention here is not to just brush the OLF with a blame paint. It is rather to bring to light our collective challenge and constructively address it for the greater good of our liberation struggle.

In light of this approach, two prime reasons stand out why we rest the responsibility for the current state of the Oromo political affairs mainly on the OLF's shoulder. First, the departure of the front from the ideological base on which it was initially anchored has severely wrecked its foundation. Over the years, we have witnessed the OLF (with the exception of one of its factions) tacitly dropping the cause of liberation of Oromiyaa and embarking on the course of seeking a resolution for the 'Oromo case' within the Ethiopian political context. Indulging in this ill-conceived experiment has cost the front dearly. The experiment has resulted in fracturing the organization and turning off its visionary and high caliber members and supporters at large to the extent of causing them to abandon the front all together. Above all, it has cast a profound doubt on the veracity of the front: That is, on its credibility on the maxim of its political engagement and pragmatic political moves in the eye of the Oromo public and beyond. Worse off, the ideological dualism that the OLF at times appears to toy with has left a murky political environment within the liberation camp. Such an environment remains the root cause of the current state of political gridlock that is arresting the progress of the Oromo liberation struggle.

Second, the failure of the OLF to see merits in and work at promoting the unity of all forces within the liberation camp has immeasurably undercut the political powerhouse of the struggle. As the forerunner organization, the OLF should have been the core base of unity of all Oromo liberation forces. It was one that could have played a major role in relentlessly engaging and unifying all member organizations of ULFO. The whole essence of bringing all Oromo political forces under the umbrella of ULFO was to create a more conducive environment for forging a solid unity that could radically transform the liberation struggle. This being the case, the OLF's departure from ULFO left a significant void in the union. Of all the organizations, the OLF was the most ideally positioned to catalyze the unification process to a full merger of all member organizations of ULFO. It had the most manpower, the organizational capacity, and the experience in the struggle, not to mention the ideal political ambiance created for it, to expedite the process of unifying all forces into one political entity. However, the OLF has failed to use these attributes to the advantage of uniting the forces and giving the struggle an edge. Instead, it had relegated its share of responsibility in ULFO to the back burner and jumped on the bandwagon of the Alliance for Freedom Democracy (AFD) – the alliance of Abyssinian led political organizations. This fiasco had turned out to be another thorny issue that brought about the current appalling state of the Oromo political affairs.

The Issue of Political Alliance

In essence, seeking an alliance of one form or another is a pragmatic approach in the formulation of an equation of a political action plan. There is no dispute in looking out for or forming one that certainly renders some leverage for political expediency. What is at issue here is the degree of compatibility of political objectives of the parties forming an alliance. Also, the process involved prior to forming or joining a political alliance and the benefits expected to accrue from the alliance are prone for question.

In the case of the OLF, we observe two fallacies in its alliance forming or joining practices. At first, the political organizations that it allied with in the past and those that it is currently working with have a political objective that is at odd with the Oromo right to self-determination. Specially, the Abyssinian led political organizations do not recognize this aspiration of our people, at a bare minimum, even the present status of Afaan Oromoo as the working language of learning institutions, public offices, and the media in Oromiyaa. Outside the short term goal of dismantling the TPLF-led Ethiopian regime, there is literally no meaningful blue print that the allied parties charted in common that clearly reveals how the post-Wayane political order addresses the Oromo question. Secondly, the OLF has laid no requisite foundation prior to seeking alliance. In other words, it has not put its own house in order. Problematic intra-organizational issues have not been resolved. Furthermore, it has not attempted to form and solidify the alliance of political forces within the Oromo liberation camp. As a matter of priority,

the OLF should have first attended to the task of conjoining all Oromo political forces. By so doing, it must have mustered the support of all such forces and the Oromo public before joining an alliance of non-Oromo organizations.

Not pursuing such fundamentals and joining the AFD proved to be a costly political miscalculation for the OLF in the past. The alliance turned out to be a political liability that had weakened the OLF both organizationally and politically. One should not expect a different outcome from the current political engagement of the OLF with Abyssinian-led parties such as Ginbot-7. It would undoubtedly further damage the viability of the front, and, by extension, it could stifle the progress of the struggle of the Oromo people. It is therefore critically important for any Oromo political organization to make a radical departure from a casual practice of joining an alliance of parasitic nature.

Political Parasitism

The model of various alliances that Abyssinian political entities have so far framed is one and the same. It may have been presented with different hues. However, all its variants reflect one underlying attribute: the attribute of political parasitism. It is designed in such a way to promote the exclusive political interest of Abyssinians at the expense of others. Abyssinians cannily approach political organizations of other nationalities for partnership in an alliance merely to use them as Trojan horses that expeditiously get them to the pinnacle of political power. Without being specific, cases that attest to this fact are many in the history of the Oromo–Abyssinian political relation.

For peace and development to take roots in the empire state of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region at large, all parties vowing to tackle the present political challenge in the empire must collectively come up with a unique model of political alliance: a model that is radically different from the one intended to serve the interest of only one ethnic/national group. It has to be one that symbiotically benefits all parties to the alliance. Unless a seismic shift is made to a model more adaptive to the present political reality in Ethiopia, it is inconceivable to see a change of political landscape in Ethiopia for many years to come. For such a model to emerge there has to be a fundamental transformation of political outlook on the part of Abyssinian political elites.

The Abyssinian political forces that profess to be democratic must live up to their names. They must come to their senses, leave behind a nostalgia driven political thought of yesteryear, think outside the box, and soul search for a political means that addresses the recurring and more escalating crisis in Ethiopia. Echoing merely the slogan of the 'unity of Ethiopia' and prescribing a hollow democracy alone won't cut it. Patronizing Oromo political organizations and delving in the Oromo political affairs is a futile and counter productive exercise, and it would hardly lead to any meaningful political solution. To bring a lasting solution to the political quagmire of the empire, the Abyssinian political forces must be prepared to accept and respect the collective aspiration of the Oromo and other ethno-national groups in the empire. Sticking to the old gun benefits no one but the current TPLF-led regime of Ethiopia. It would amount to extending the life-span of the regime to further cause political, economic, and social crisis.

Crossing the Critical Cross-roads – Possible Paths

Of all time, as stated earlier, the Oromo liberation struggle is now at critical juncture. It is marred with myriad of internal problems. Equally, its external challenges are enormous. To overcome them, the struggle must be jump-started to leap forward and cross the critical cross-roads ahead of it. It is therefore incumbent upon the Oromo liberation forces to find ways and means that impart a surge of energy that propels the struggle from the current lethargic state.

From ULFO's perspectives, we suggest the following pointers to be seriously considered in the endeavour of seeking ways to restore and give a timely edge to the Oromo national liberation struggle:

- First, the notion of mending the ideological rift created within the Oromo nationalist forces should be taken critically. These forces need to engage one another in somber and relentless discourse on the ideological divide. Forces that changed heart on the course set out for the struggle at the outset must revisit the issue. They must be mindful of the damage the struggle has sustained because of the midway infusion of the new idea – the idea that tacitly waters down the liberation of Oromiyaa. We strongly believe that the return of such forces to the initial ideological base would relieve the internal strife and give the struggle a major leap.

- Second, the task of uniting all Oromo liberation forces must be seen as a matter of urgency. The consolidation of such forces under one organization and leadership would elevate the powerhouse for the struggle and give it a tremendous momentum. The impact of unified forces on the struggle is quite huge as it has far-reaching rippling effect that would galvanize the Oromo mass.
- Third, engaging the civil society (community organizations, professional associations, academic groups etc.) and the general public at large to actively contribute to the cause of the struggle must take a paramount importance. Under one strong, visionary and industrious political body, the entire nation must be mobilized to guarantee the struggle a success.
- Fourth, seeking alliance of non-Oromo forces must be considered in the political equation of our struggle. Once emerged as a solid political entity with one seasoned leadership, it is vitally important to seek strategic allies in the empire state of Ethiopia. Ethno-national groups who share common history of oppression with the Oromo people will be natural allies of the Oromo liberation struggle. Therefore, Oromos must seek their alliance and work with them actively.
- Last but not least, the mission of outreaching and working on short and/or long-term goals that advance the collective interest of the Oromo nation should be considered and pursued with genuine democratic forces in the region that recognize the Oromo aspiration for self-determination and espouse lasting peace, democracy and development in the Horn of Africa.

It is a profound belief of ULFO that the Oromo liberation struggle is destined to surmount any challenges and succeed should Oromo nationalists stay on the liberation course and diligently carry out the task of organizational capacity building, developing unified and seasoned leadership, mobilizing the Oromo mass to actively engage in the enhancement of our cause, and winning friends for the Oromo struggle in the international political arena.

The United Liberation Forces of Oromiyaa

Oromiyaa Shall be free!!!!

Unity is Strength !!!!!