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QAANQEE BOSONAA: The voice of Oromo National Liberation Struggle

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Oromo National Liberation Struggle in Retrospect and in Prospect

The Past

The Present

The Future

PART TWO ( Series--- 2 of 3)

5. The Question of Strategy of  
Oromo National Liberation Struggle.

People don't admit that they don't know or don't want to know that the Oromo national liberation struggle has its own characteristics. What are the characteristics of Oromo national liberation struggle?

We think there are four principal ones.

The first is that Oromia is a vast colony which is unevenly developed politically and economically and, which has gone through national movement since popular revolt of 1974.

This characteristic indicates that it is possible for the Oromia's national liberation struggle to develop and attain victory. Let us analyze this characteristic.

Oromia's political and economic development is uneven and lopsided a weak agricultural economy co-exists with preponderant pastoral economy. A few modern industrial and commercial cities coexist with a vast stagnant countryside. Thousands industrial workers co-exist with millions of peasants and handicrafts men working under the backward systems. The big Abyssinian warlords (EPRDF) controlling the central government coexist with small Oromo war lords (OPDO) controlling the Oromo provinces.

Oromia is a vast country with freewheeling several regions extending west to east, north to south on equatorial and tropical jungles. Hence, one needs not worry about lack of room for maneuver.

Oromia has gone through a period of considerable national liberation struggle since 1974. This has provided the seeds from which Oromo freedom forces, namely, the Oromo liberation organizations have grown and provided the masses with the experience of participation in a national liberation struggle.

We say, therefore, that the first characteristic of Oromia's national struggle for independence is that it is waged in a geographically vast colonized country which is unevenly developed politically and economically and which has gone through some probationary periods since the eruption of 1970's national movement. This characteristic basically determines our military strategy of national liberation and tactics.

- The second characteristic is that our enemy is big and powerful. The bitter enemy of our national liberation, the EDRDF, is a politico-military party, which seized political power and has more or less stabilized its power. It has gained the support of the world's former principal colonial states. It has remodeled its army, which has become different in Ethiopian history and on the whole similar to the armies of modern states. This army is much better supplied with weapons and military machines (materials) than Oromo freedom forces and is larger than any army in Ethiopian history or for that matter, than the standing army of any neighboring countries. There is a world of difference between the EPRDF army and Oromo freedom forces. The EPRDF controls the key positions or lifelines in the politics, economy, communications and culture of the country. Thus, this factor necessarily makes the Oromo struggle for national independence different in so many ways from those of anti-colonial resistance in general.

- The third characteristic is that Oromo liberation forces are small and weak. The Oromo liberation forces, starting as guerrilla units of hit-and-run, come into being under absolute monarchy giving way to nascent fascist military junta under hypocritical pretext of socialism.

Our national liberation movement exists in scattered and isolated mountainous or remote regions and receives no outside help whatsoever. Economic and cultural conditions in our base areas (DIRRE) are backward compared with those in the EPRDF areas. Our zones of operations embrace only rural districts inhabited by nomadic population.

These areas were extremely small in the beginning and even dramatically shrunk because of the consecutive mopping operations of the colonial army. Moreover, they are fluid and not stationary and the Oromo liberation force has not really consolidated its sanctuary and bases. The Oromo national liberation force is numerically small, its arms are poor, and it has great difficulty in obtaining supplies such as food, knapsacks, clothing, and other logistics.

This characteristic presents a sharp contrast to the preceding one. From this sharp contrast, it should have arisen the strategy and tactics of struggle for national independence.

- The fourth characteristic is the fledgling national liberation Leadership and the Promises of national liberation Revolution.

This characteristic is the inevitable consequence of the first one. It has given rise to two features. On one hand, despite the fact that Oromo national liberation struggle is taking place in period of colonial reactions in Ethiopia and throughout the colonialist world, still victory is possible if and only if it is led by a qualified leadership of national liberation which could maintain the support of the Oromo people. Thanks to this support, our national forces small as they are, are politically very powerful and stand firmly opposed to enormous EPRDF 's army, even though militarily they place real difficulties in the way of EPRDF offensive. Small as they are, the Oromo liberation forces have still great potential of fighting capacity, if led by a competent national liberation leadership. The fact that they are born of the national-colonial oppression and are fighting for their interests, if their commanders and fighters are politically united under qualified leadership, victory is a matter of time..

On the other hand, EPRDF in a sharp contrast opposes the principle of national liberation and stands for perpetual of colonial slavery in Ethiopia and therefore, has no support from the vast majority of the oppressed nations and nationalities. Though it has a large army, the EPRDF cannot make its soldiers and the many lower-ranking officers, who were originally small producers, risk their lives willingly for it. Its officers and soldiers are politically divided, which is in the march of events reduces its fighting capacity.

## 6. Our Strategy and Tactics Ensuing from our Unique National Characteristics.

The above stated four principal characteristics of Oromia's national liberation struggle determine the guide line of Oromo's struggle for self-determination as well as many of its strategic and tactical principles. It follows from the first and fourth characteristics that it is possible for the Oromo national liberation forces to grow and defeat their enemy. Therefore, we remain optimistic and categorically stand against the tendencies of defeatism in our ranks. As well defined under second and third characteristics, it may be very difficult for the Oromo liberation forces to grow rapidly or defeat their enemy quickly. Hence, we categorically refute dream for quick victory and firmly stand against short-lived military adventure. In other words, the struggle will be protracted and may even be lost if it is not led a competent national leadership.

These are two aspects of Oromia war of resistance against Abyssinian colonialism. They exist simultaneously, that is, there are favorable factors and there are difficulties. This is the fundamental law of Oromia. National struggle for independence from which many other laws ensue. The history of our 30 years struggle has proved the validity of this law. He who has eyes but fails to see this basic law cannot direct Oromo national liberation struggle, cannot lead Oromo freedom forces to victories.

## 7. The Question of the Balance of Force

Every Oromo suffering from the disasters of the Abyssinian colonial aggression and struggling for the survival of his/her nation yearns for victory. But, what actually will be the cause of struggle?

Can we win? Can we win quickly? Many people are talking about a protracted struggle. But, why is it a protracted struggle? How to carry on a prolonged struggle? Many Oromos are talking about final victories, but when will final victory be ours? How shall we strive for final victory? Not every Oromo has found answers to these questions; in fact to this day most people have not done so. Therefore the defeatist exponents of the theory of federation and peaceful resolution have come forward to tell us that Oromia will remain under colony so that final victory will not be ours.

On the other hand, some emotional friends have come forward to tell the people that Oromo will win very quickly without having to exert any great effort peacefully. Are these views correct? We have said all along that they are not. However, most people have not yet grasped what we have been saying. This is partly because we Oromo nationalists did not do enough propaganda and explanatory work.

## 8. The Question of the form of National Liberation Struggle.

The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by non-peaceful means, is the central task and highest form of national liberation revolution. This national revolutionary principle of national liberation struggle holds true universally for Oromia and for all other countries.

But while the principle remains the same, its application by the national revolutionary forces finds its expression in varying ways according to the varying conditions.

Some countries practice democratic traditions when they are not under the rule of fascist or when they not at war. Because of these characteristics, it is the task of freedom fighters to educate the broad masses and build up strength through a long period of legal struggle, and thus prepare for the final overthrow of colonialism. In such countries, the question is one of a long legal struggle, of utilizing parliament as a platform of economic and political strikes, of organizing popular forces and educating the broad masses. There, the form of Organization is legal and the form of struggle is bloodless (non-military).

On the issue of national liberation, national liberation fronts in the colonial countries oppose the war of aggression waged by their own countries; if such wars occur, the policy of these organizations is to bring about the defeat of the repressive governments of their own countries. The one war they want to fight is the national liberation war, which they are preparing. But this insurrection and national liberation war should not be launched until the colonial class becomes really helpless, until the majority of the oppressed people are determined to rise in arms and fight, and until the rural masses are giving willing help to the national liberation forces. And when the time comes to launch such an insurrection, the first step will be to seize the cities, and then advance into the countryside and not the other way about. All this has been done by the national liberation fronts in colonial countries, and it has been proved correct by the experiences of national liberation revolutions.

Oromia is different however. The characteristics of Oromia are that she is not independent and the Abyssinian colonial system is anti-democratic. It follows that we have no parliament to make use of and no legal right to organize the broad masses to strike.

In our condition, basically the task of the national liberation forces is not to go through a long period of legal struggle before launching popular insurrection and national liberation war, and not to seize the big cities first and then occupy the countryside, but the reverse.

All this shows the difference between the Ethiopian colonial Empire and the other countries. In Oromia, non-peaceful means should be the main form of struggle and the national liberation army is the main form of Organization. All other forms of organizations such as mass organizations and mass struggles are also extremely important and indeed indispensable and in no circumstances overlooked, but their purpose, is to serve the national liberation war.

In Oromia to day, the armed movement is fighting the armed colonial force. This is one of the specific features, which fits Oromia's conditions perfectly. The main task of the national liberation forces, a task confronting it almost from its very inception should be to unite with as many allies as possible and according to the circumstances to organize armed struggles for national and social liberation against armed colonial bureaucracy. Without armed struggle, the Oromo people and the Oromo liberation front will have no standing at all in Oromia and it will be daydream to accomplish the goal of national independence.

Some of our leaders don't grasp this point fully. They don't recognize the supreme importance of armed struggle in Oromia or seriously prepare for war and organize armed forces and apply themselves to the study of military strategy and tactics. During the Charter period, 1991-1992 they purposefully neglected the task of organizing armed forces and laid one-sided stress on the mass movement with the result that the whole mass movement collapsed.

Experiences tell us that Oromia's problems cannot be settled without armed forces. An understanding of this point will help us in successfully waging the war of Resistance against Abyssinian colonialism from now on. The fact that the whole nation is rising in the armed resistance in the war against Abyssinian aggression should give a better understanding of the importance of this question in the whole national liberation organization. All Oromo nationalists should be prepared to take up arms and go to the front at any moment. Our main field of work should be on propaganda of psychological warfare and in the enemy's rear.

This is an excellent antidote against the tendency of some of the leaders and members to be willing only to work in peacetime. In Oromia, organizational work and mass work should directly be linked with armed struggle; there must not be any organizational and mass work that is isolated and stands by itself. Organizational work and mass work should be co-coordinated with the national liberation war and should serve exclusively the needs of the front. In one word, the whole organization must pay great attention to war, study military matters and prepare itself for fighting.

## 9. The Mode of Existence of National Liberation Organization.

In many instances, Oromo liberation army has frequently been considered by our leadership the armed wing of liberation front, in order to demonstrate its dependence on peace-time political apparatus. This tendency copied from models of other countries to the demands of our concrete conditions. WBO is nothing but the Oromo people in uniform. In the absence of concrete knowledge of a concrete analysis, it is dangerous to import organizational formulas and try to apply in a totally different environment. Clearly, it is physically dangerous since many military errors derive from single political error, and a single military error can result in the total destruction of our fledgling national liberation army. Doubtless, the fact that our armed struggle has not been buried under the weights of its many missteps, fumbling and false starts is tribute to history's tolerance.

However, the penalty for an ineffective organization and leadership is military defeat. And the price of military defeat is the butchery, wholesale arrest, and disappearance of hundreds of national patriots and freedom fighters.

Subordinating our national liberation army (WBO) to an organization that has not radically changed its normal peace time organizational structures and policies or the treatment of the liberation army as a subsidiary ramification of the political organization brought in its wake a series of fatally dangerous practical consequence. Let us review those errors rapidly.

### 9.1 Dependence of our Liberation Army on the Urban Centered Leadership.

From the very beginning of our national liberation movement, our leadership has no clear idea as to how to launch armed struggle and therefore, consumed a quite considerable time in peace time activities. They considered the liberation army as an armed wing simply installed for the purpose of instrumentality. The norm of democratic centralism required the commanders of our liberation army to totally depend on the urban-based elite. The leaders of the army were technically forced to consult the urban-centered leadership before making a move. This style of leadership brought in its wake the complete lose of initiative and freedom of action. Besides, our national liberation army was systematically subordinated to the leadership that knows nothing of the national liberation war and its problems and is immersed in the political life of good times and premature diplomatic maneuvers. Undoubtedly, the experience after the so-called Charter showed that our leadership was not psychologically ready to wage a war of resistance against the newly emerging colonial class and wasted a great deal of time and energy in self-deception. It indulged itself in undermining the strength of our enemy and exaggerating our incipient force. Our leadership was psychologically and morally disarmed from the very beginning and lost confidence in the combatants and the history making potential capacity of the Oromo people. The origin and ideological genesis of the past and the present hallucination for federation and for peaceful resettlement has something to do with the pacifist and the urban oriented nature of our leadership.

The penalty for this strategy of self-deception is not only military defeat but also the butchery, the wholesale arrest and disappearance of hundreds of our combatants before and after the Charter period. Let us not forget that our enemy carries out selective execution and imprisonment. It executed heroes

like Nadhi Gammada and Lamnessa Boru while setting free other domesticated political animals who were willing to flee. This does not include genuine ex-political prisoners. The execution of our comrades like Muhe Abdo and his associates is a fresh example in our sad memory. Finally we have no one to blame but our leadership and ourselves. Considering that the prime role of a leadership is to offer an example of courage and sacrifice, we all are not determined enough to abandon the tranquillising city life and join our liberation army.

### 9.2 Dependence on Urban Based Leadership

The lack of political power led our national liberation army to logistical and military dependence on urban based leadership. This dependence often led to abandonment of the army by the city political elite. The subordination of our national liberation army to urban political leadership not only created practical problems but a sense of dependence and inferiority complex. They had to wait for everything from the top leadership. Our political cadres, our guidelines, money, arms even the time table of the Operations were sent by using remote control mechanism. That kind of dependence of the political leaders of our movement finally robbed off our army freedom to take action and cornered it in a passive defense. Strategic centralization and tactical decentralization were systematically ignored. What we have recently experienced in the western front of Horro-\*Guduru and Eastern front of Gara Mulataa are fresh cases in point. We were tragically forced to abandon the armed resistance due mainly to logistical dependence on remote control mechanism projected from the outside world.

Many of our leaders abandoned the field, deserted or chose to return to the city to under take the so-called diplomatic campaign. One of the terrible abandonment our national liberation army has suffered was the abandonment of OLF leadership - under the cover of undertaking other diplomatic assignment in the outside world. (1995-1998)

### 9.3 The Absence of Unified Leadership.

This entails a lack of general plan of action; it was not possible to combine and co-ordinate the available means and gear them to a main direction of action. The lack of near and single command put our liberation army in the situation of an artillery gunner and who has not been told in which direction to fire, of a line of attack without a principal direction of offence. Many of our national heroes were lost on the field (for example Milkeessaa Gada, Guutamaa Hawaas Buruy´soo Guutoo Caalie and many others). This experience tells us that the amount and strength of firepower mean nothing without a plan, without assigning a principal sector to be subjected to concentrated fire or crossfire. The absence of a centralized executive, qualified and efficient leadership - a politico-military leadership, led us to such incalculable waste and such slaughter of our comrades.

Our national liberation organization was born by dual nature from the very inception. The front has two arms, the WBO military and the other legal and peaceful. This contradictory nature of the organization in its wake gave rise to contradictory policies: armed struggle and peaceful negotiation. A case in point is the OLF pacifist group's agenda for peace & nostalgia of Charter making.

Hallucination for genuinely functioning federalism and the Charter dilemmas are also the highest development of those contradictory positions. How to combine the action of the two? Even more complicated how to co-ordinate the two wings of the apparatus, the leadership in the metropolitan and the rural fighting force:

Only a notably coherent and vigorous leadership armed with a long-term strategic national plan actuated by a correct political analysis can co-ordinate these two facets of direct action.

Qualitatively, new challenges need qualitatively new ideological responses and new type of leadership. Honestly speaking, it is too anachronistic to try to solve our problem by the old methods and styles of leadership. In the last two decades, our leadership lost no opportunity in enjoying the advantages of all forms of struggle without the drawbacks of any, to refuse to select one form of struggle as fundamental and another as subordinate. Each arm was left to wave independently of the other, each on its own responsibility, without co-ordinated action or a system of priorities. This abstract policy, reformist or disoriented, converted our national liberation movement into disjointed marionettes.

During the Charter period, a wrong turn by our top leadership led us to other wrong turns, in the opposite direction, by the two wings of our organization legalist yearning of the political leadership were matched in the armed sector by uncontrolled actions and sporadic violence:

#### a. Uncontrolled actions and anarchy

In the absence of a single command, our national army could not have clear strategy of armed struggle. In the absence of a clear strategy, it had no plan of action. Some of them were cut off from the people and dismantled due to logistical dependence on the peasants and nomadic population. Protective villagization was the most successful antidote of the strategy of counter insurgency. The actions in the cities and countryside were not synchronized. Each one acted on his own. The urban activities were not subordinated to the strategic force in the countryside. Our national army was not recognized as the directives wing and motive force of the movement.

The results were independent and spontaneous actions, which not only jeopardized the direction of the movement but also the very significance of the battles under taken. Sabotages and the suburban guerrilla actions were not encouraged to develop. Even if there were any, they were not put under over all strategic plan.

#### B. Dispersion in the very heart of our national army.

The absence of a single command and a centralized politico-military leadership favored the premature creation of several zones of operations. Given the unequal relation between the colonial army of EPRDF and the popular forces, this division weakened our national army even more than it did the repressive army. The latter suffered less from having to disperse its forces than our liberation army. The colonial army attacked our forces not simultaneously but one by one. They obtained an absolute superiority in every front (be it west or east). Because, our forces had not been united in a single army but failed to

apply the tactics of dispersal and concentration. Here, for example, the Eastern Front speaks for itself. A vast territory does not appear to be a sufficient argument for retarding our national army. It was an artificial growth of our movement that did not correspond to a real growth of the liberation army nor of its offensive capacity that was responsible for the retardation of our movement. In fact, this forced growth - cause and effect of the absence of a single politico-military command- weakened our liberation army (WBO).

The spontaneous and disorderly proliferation of our army-manned by untrained persons, traditional commanders, most of whom were wiped out in the first months (example the eastern zones) demonstrated clearly that our liberation army did not constitute a unified movement action in accordance with a matured plan of action. Among WBO that survived the first and the second offensive waves and strategic encirclement by EPRDF colonial forces, non-developed with sufficient speed and strength to be able to catalyze the national liberation struggle around it. Thus, until recently, our liberation army could not act as a substantial counter weight against the colonial army. A lack of a single efficient, effective qualified politico-military leadership of the armed resistance, truly authoritative and influential provokes the dispersion of our forces and this dispersion in turn procrastinated the advent of a single leadership.

This procrastination sometimes is deliberate; that new groups are created in order to hinder an establishment of a single leadership – the cause and effect of Oromo National Congress But in this case, it is more a matter of accumulating reserves to be used for usurpation of power rather than of active national army. Groups in our army are not intended to wage a national war of liberation but to maintain a reserve of political personnel and make propaganda for their promoters. To have a guerrilla force gives prestige. It makes it possible to manipulate groups in WBO and impose oneself on the stage of vacuum power. Simple power rivalry among competing individuals led our army to an ineffectual fossilization of the process of its development.

### C. Naturally developing leadership versus artificial leadership.

A lack of unity in the command unleashed an infinite number of compensatory mechanisms in our organization. One of the favorites, the creation of phantom leadership composed of essentially members loyal to the authoritarian leaders at the top of the organizational echelon.

Magnificent programs are always widely publicized abroad but remain secret to the members of the organization. Our leaders think they have squared accounts with history because they mapped out the agendas for peace and genuinely functioning federalism in contradistinction to stigma of “separatism”. Ridiculous!

We frankly declare no artificial machinery can fill the vacuum created by a lack of military and political leadership in our struggle for national independence. The brilliant program, peace time organizational apparatus, joint statements, the alliances, peaceful agendas, all these glittering artificial machinery absorbs attention and thus provides excuses for not putting into operation our liberation army which alone can give historical significance and effectiveness to our legitimate cause.

Comrades, we should not mix-up warfare and its propaganda. No artificial bureaucratic machinery can fill the vacuum created by a lack of qualified politic-military leadership. The recent de facto election of the general secretary of OLF is an unscrupulous attempt to cancel one vacuum with another vacuum. To try to hide one vacuum with another vacuum, 2q1 does not eliminate the first vacuum; it merely adds a second. Once again, in spite of all previous experiences, unproductive activities: lamentations, paper works, conferences, discourse in a nets hell lip services, take priority over actions as if a national revolutionary movement is measured by the number of these vanities.

First, it is necessary to proceed from reorganizing WBO to the reorganization of OLF: to attempt to proceed in the opposite way is pointless. WBO should be considered the central dynamic nucleus from which the future national liberation leadership and future democratic republic of Oromia develops.

The weaker our national liberation army the more – we must mistrust alliances, federations, Charters peaceful resolutions with the elements of Abyssinian colonial class be it new or old. The stronger we are, the more we can permit ourselves to seek such alliances. If we ease military pressure even briefly on our adversaries, immediately all our attempts will lack a point of support and falls into a void. Diplomacy and psychological warfare is effective if it is accompanied by victory at battlefield. Infiltration and pressure are useful if we fight and strike at the same time.

History confirms that the oppressors negotiate with the oppressed only when they are cornered by popular force. We may speak of peace, but only while making war. This is the only way that the slogan of peace can turn against the oppressor rather than against us. The desire for peace should not tranquilize or retard our struggle for independence but energize national liberation movement.

The next point is:

No national liberation Front that is basically a deliberative can assume leadership of national liberation war. Only a technically capable executive group, centralized and united on the basis of identical class interests can do so (i.e.

only a national revolutionary general staff ). A national front, heterogeneous by nature is the scene of political wrangling, debates, endless deliberations and temporary compromises.

The tendency of our top leaders assuming only a diplomatic conduct of national liberation struggle but not its operational leadership is basically dangerous to our cause. Obviously this work methods have a political origin, otherwise where would they have come from? From a lack of morale, fear of imminent sacrifices? Militants possess moral, an admirable morale. It is always dedicated national revolutionaries who can carry the burden of war of independence. In our struggle all most all the dead were the dedicated ones. However, a result sacrifice is not an end itself and martyrdom does not constitute proof for a national liberation organization to continue to exist. When the lists of martyrs grows long, when every act of courage is converted into martyrdom and regression it is because something is wrong. And it is just as much a moral duty to seek out the cause, as it is to pay homage to the murdered, disappeared or imprisoned combatants. Underneath there are hidden defects to be revealed. We lack concrete analysis of the balance of force and design appropriate liberation strategy.

The phrase armed struggle is brandished, repeated endlessly on paper, in our programs but the use of the phrase can not conceal the fact that in many places the determination to carry out the armed struggle and the positive definition of a corresponding strategy are still lacking.

What do we mean by strategy? The differentiation between the primary and the secondary from which come a clear priority of tasks and functions. A happy pragmatism will permit all forms of struggle to drag on together, will let them come to an understanding among themselves.

At one point, however the negative definition of strategy may appear in the form of a refusal: to the idea that under certain conditions peaceful forms of mass struggle must be subordinate to armed mass struggle have sometimes been opposed the idea that such subordinations, would be equivalent to making the political line of the national front dependent on military strategy on the fronts armed apparatus, and would subordinate political leadership to military leadership. National liberation warfare is essentially political and for this reason the political cannot be counterpoised to the military. First, we cannot see how our leadership and we ourselves in Oromia today, can remain aloof from armed struggle. But how many of us prefer ourselves day after day with question of military strategy and produce a single studies on this issue? '

Secondly it has been proved by our own experience that for the training of freedom fighter the national liberation war is more decisive than political activity without guerrilla actions.

#### 10. The Mode of Manifestation of National Liberation Leadership

Which should be strengthened to day peaceful means or non-peaceful means, military leadership or political leadership or both political and military (police-military leadership)? Which is the decisive link? Where should the principal effort be made to enhance the Oromo national liberation struggle?

Such are the questions, which divide militants today in Oromo struggle for national independence. In our analysis we have to do away with theoretical and historical orthodoxy, which worship the tradition of peaceful means over non-peaceful means and peacetime organization over wartime organization. Organizations and leaderships exist here on earth and are subject to rigors of terrestrial laws. If they have been born, they can die and be reborn in other forms. How does rebirth come about? Under what form can the historic vanguard (leadership) reappear?

A national revolutionary armed struggle, wherever it exists or is in preparation, requires a thorough going transformation of peacetime practices. National liberation war, as we know, is an extension of national politics but with specific methods and procedures. The effective leadership of an armed national revolutionary struggle requires a new style of leadership, a new method of organization, and new physical and ideological responses on the part of leaders and militants.