

Eritrean People's 17 Years of Heroic Armed Struggle

"Self-reliant protracted people's war is the only way to victory"

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Seventeen glorious years have elapsed since the Eritrean people embarked upon the road of armed struggle to realize their age old aspirations -- national independence and liberation. Seventeen years ago, on September 1, 1961, a dozen Eritrean patriots reverberated gun blasts in the western lowlands of the country heralding the beginning of the armed national liberation struggle. The beginning of the armed struggle as a natural development and dialectical outcome of the struggle of the preceding years signified a qualitatively new stage in the Eritrean people's centuries old struggle against foreign aggression. It was an expression of the Eritrean people's deep sentiment for freedom and social justice and their determination to drive out the Ethiopian aggressors from Eritrean soil. Thus, September 1, 1961, the date of the birth of the armed struggle that has brought the Eritrean people nearer to their complete victory "is not", as the EPLF on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the armed struggle said, "an ordinary day", but the day on which "a great historical cornerstone of our protracted popular struggle" was laid down.

It is through the persistence on the road of protracted people's war that the Eritrean people have scored many victories, that the unprecedented military, political, economic and social achievements have been registered. In the past seventeen years, the Eritrean people's, armed struggle has traversed an arduous and tortuous road of many twists and turns. It has, in particular since the formation of the EPLF in 1970, shattered the numerous obstacles placed in front of it by its enemies and has today developed into a full fledged people's war engulfing the

entire people except for a few traitors. The armed struggle has reached a high stage, a stage where almost the entire country is liberated and the Ethiopian occupation forces are besieged in a few cities awaiting their complete annihilation.

The past year, the 17th year of the armed struggle, saw the further intensification of the Eritrean armed national liberation struggle. In the wake of the liberation of the important cities of Keren and Dekemhare in early July 1977, the Eritrean People's Liberation Army, continuing its advance on the cities, liberated a number of towns, brought the strategic highways of Asmara-Senafe and Asmara-Massawa under its full control and tightened its siege of the few cities still under enemy control. The enemy was on the other hand in complete disarray. Although the enemy made several attempts to recapture the strategic roads and attack the liberated areas, it miserably failed and took very heavy material and human losses. Throwing their all out support behind the fascist junta, the Soviet Union and Cuba also made concerted efforts to liquidate the Eritrean revolution. There was nothing the Soviet Union and Cuba did not do to turn our country into a depot of their sophisticated weapons and a camp of thousands of their troops. In spite of the overwhelming odds, the Eritrean struggle maintained its initiative and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

The 17th year of the Eritrean armed struggle also witnessed intense mass activity. On the one hand, the masses were fully drawn into the battlefields against the enemy and, on the other hand, they engaged themselves in intensive work building their popular power and reconstructing their liberated areas. The organization, politicization and arming of the masses was tremendously accelerated. With the convening of the first Congress of the General Association of Eritrean Peasants and the Association of Eritrean Students in March and May respectively the struggle to organize the masses marked a new stage. It was a busy year of great mass demonstrations and rallies, a year in which the Eritrean people fully asserted their popular democratic power in the villages, towns and cities. The liberated areas were greatly strengthened and consolidated with their economic reconstruction on the basis of the correct principle of self-reliance. Another big achievement of the year was the important steps taken towards the realization of

national unity. Thus, the 17th year of the Eritrean struggle was a year of great accomplishments in all aspects of the struggle.

The Eritrean struggle is the longest ongoing armed national liberation struggle in Africa and one of the highly developed armed struggles in the world today. As, indeed, the other people's armed struggle of the past and present, it has confirmed the universally valid truth that the colonized and oppressed peoples can free themselves from oppression only by rising up in arms. The Eritrean people began the armed struggle in 1961 having learned from bitter experience that the counter-revolutionary violence unleashed by their colonialist oppressors can only be countered by waging armed struggle. Before resorting to armed struggle, the Eritrean people resisted in peaceful ways. They bitterly opposed their country's forcible annexation by Ethiopia which the imperialists instigated in 1950 but their expressed will for independence was ignored and thrown aside. During the 1950's the expansionist feudal regime of Haile Selassie responded to the people's peaceful demonstrations and strikes with ferocious violence. Thousands of workers, students, peasants and other patriots were brutally killed, imprisoned and maimed. Under Ethiopian colonial occupation, the Eritrean people have known nothing but counter-revolutionary warfare, oppression, humiliation and degradation. It was out of this concrete lesson that the Eritrean people came to realize the futility of resisting an armed enemy empty-handed. From their bitter experience, the Eritrean people were able to grasp Chairman Mao's profound teaching that "there is only one way to eliminate it (war -Ed.) and that is to oppose war by war, to oppose counter-revolutionary war with revolutionary war." Hence, the armed struggle was begun as the only road to defeating the Ethiopian occupationists and their imperialist masters and liberating the homeland.

In the course of the armed struggle, the Eritrean people have learned even more valuable lessons about the correctness of the road they have chosen. It was not long before the armed struggle was started that the Haile Selassie regime, with the full military and political support of the U.S. imperialists and Israeli Zionists, intensified its war of genocide to crush the armed resistance of the Eritrean people. Vowing "to punish the bandits", it pursued a "scorched earth" policy employing Hitlerite methods of destruction and terror to kill the determined fighting spirit of

the masses. In 1967 alone hundreds of villages were destroyed by aerial bombardment and, consequently, tens of thousands of people were made refugees in the neighboring countries. Despite the enemy's savage crimes and the ELF's failure to lead the struggle as well as the obstacles it created, the Eritrean people defiantly continued their struggle. When the liberation movement gave birth to the EPLF in 1970, a new chapter was opened. Under the EPLF's correct leadership the struggle has since developed tremendously. The armed struggle gained momentum. It was the telling blows of the Eritrean revolutionary war together with the Ethiopian people's struggle that brought the feudal regime of Haile Selassie down.

The fascist Dergue's coming to power in 1974 did not change matters. The fascists holding power in Ethiopia today have consistently followed their predecessor's policy of genocide in Eritrea. As a matter of fact, they have escalated the war to the highest scale. As soon as the fascist junta seized power the first major statement it made was a war declaration against the Eritrean revolution. In early 1975, it conducted a large scale war to "once and for all crush" the Eritrean liberation struggle. Although it brought incalculable damage to the lives and property of the Eritrean people and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, the junta's aggressive adventure was successfully shattered by the heroic Eritrean liberation forces. The junta has since undertaken numerous dangerous adventures to drown the Eritrean struggle in blood and attain its aim of exterminating the people and is today in the midst of conducting the most diabolic war exercises. At the same time, the fascist junta has pretended to appear as a peace seeker but this has always been to cover up its true fascist and war mongering nature. The experience is that whenever the fascist junta prepares for a large scale offensive it has come up with high sounding phrases about peace but only to dupe the Ethiopian masses, confuse world public opinion and take the Eritrean struggle by surprise. This confirms Lenin's statement that the oppressing classes "pay lip-service to peace and justice but in fact wage annexationist and predatory wars".

The Eritrean people have never failed to take the Dergue for what it is -- a fascist predator. In the past four years they have intensified their armed struggle against the Ethiopian occupationists and their imperialist sustainers in both depth and

speed. The aggressor troops have been cleared from the entire countryside and from big cities and towns such as Keren, Dekemhare, Nacfa, Afabet, Ghinda, Dongolo, Mai Atal, Segeneiti, Ela Bered, Digsu, Nefasit and Karora. The heavy battles now center in and around the big cities and mainly around Eritrea's capital city, Asmara. The Eritrean struggle has maintained its superiority over the Ethiopian aggressors. Holding the initiative, it is suffocating the aggressors. In the liberated areas, the new democratic order has struck deep roots. With the Eritrean masses organized, politicized and armed, most of Eritrea has been transformed into an impregnable bastion of revolution.

By waging a self-reliant protracted people's war the Eritrean masses led by EPLF have scored victory after victory and are convinced that only by persevering on this road can they achieve complete victory. The lesson drawn from the experience of the Eritrean struggle is that the Ethiopian aggressors will insist on their counter-revolutionary violence and will never give up their occupation of Eritrea voluntarily. Hence, only the continuation of the armed struggle can guarantee that the colonial occupation of our country will be smashed. That is why the historic First Congress of the EPLF resolved "after sufficiently studying the past military experience of the front in general and the strategy of liberating the land step-by-step in particular, the congress confirmed the correctness of this strategy and resolved that its continuation is necessary for the victory of the people's war."

Today, the Ethiopian fascist aggressors with the all out support of the Soviet Union and Cuba are conducting their largest military offensive to liquidate the Eritrean revolution. Despite their repeated failures to reverse the situation in their favor, they still hope to remain in Eritrea and for this they are prepared to pay whatever price.

Knowing fully well the nature of the enemy the Eritrean people have long ago charted the correct strategy of "self-reliant protracted people's war is the only way to victory" to take them to complete victory. From the rich experience they have acquired during the past glorious 17 years, the Eritrean people have learnt very well the deep meaning of waging a revolutionary armed struggle. The past 17 years have amply demonstrated to the Eritrean people that protracted people's

war is the only weapon to bring the Ethiopian aggressors to their knees.

This weapon has indeed proven correct. Colonialist Ethiopia, despite its superiority of weapons and number of troops, has been brought to its knees by the mighty Eritrean revolution. But the road ahead is still difficult. There are more sacrifices to be made. On their part, the Eritrean people are well prepared to pay any price for their just cause. Over 60,000 martyrs have paid for the noble cause of freedom and independence in the past 17 years. The spirit in Eritrea today among every man, woman and child is to fight to the last man.

Nothing can prevent the Eritrean people from achieving their objectives of independence and liberation for there is no force on this earth that can defeat a determined people fighting for a just cause. Chairman Mao has said it all: "The people of a small nation can certainly defeat aggression by by a big country, if only they dare to rise in struggle, dare to take up arms and grasp in their own hands the destiny of their own country." As we enter the 18th anniversary of our people's heroic armed struggle we are absolutely confident that our valiant masses by holding high the banner of protracted people's war will deal the Ethiopian fascist aggressors final blows and crown with full victory.

HAIL THE 17th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLE'S ARMED NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE!

LONG LIVE THE ERITREAN PEOPLE'S ARMED NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE!