

Even after this, the EPLF maintained its contact with various elements and groups and continued its efforts for the unity of the organization, i.e. the formation of a broad national front. That was the time when the enemy was preparing for the sixth offensive which started in February and continued for three months without let-up. As soon as the situation eased off, in June 1982, the EPLF issued a statement outlining the general lines of its new unity proposal. A little later, after evaluating the efforts made for unity with the EPLF and the situation of the Eritrean revolution, the EPLF, on 25 October 1982 made public its coalition proposal. Although the basic contents of the coalition did not depart from the fundamental principles of a broad national unity, it differed from the October 1977 agreement. The coalition proposal called for the formation of a broad national council to serve as an umbrella for all nationalist forces and elements first. The council would serve as a democratic forum and assist in the gradual formation of a broad front. On the basis of its proposal the EPLF set out to contact all organizations, groupings, and individuals and establish relationships with them.

Contacts were made with the strongest ELF opposition forces then based at Koroken and Tahdai in the Sudan, as well as with the PLF C.C. and PLF R.C. But, alas, the fundamental political content of the proposal, the establishment of a national council was disagreed. A smear campaign started against the military section of the proposal which called for a single military strategy and the fusion of the armed units of various groups with the EPLF which had shouldered the burden of the armed struggle, misrepresenting it as a scheme to swallow the other parties. Had these fragmented groups been in the EPLF's position, had they been the strongest and decisive force, they would undoubtedly have followed a policy of liquidation and suppression. But the EPLF took a responsible approach. In spite of its strength and decisive role it did not belittle any Eritrean group but approached them with its proposal. The elements that rejected the proposal did so not because they opposed its military provisions, but because they felt threatened by its political content indeed, a free and broad national coalition would deny them the opportunity to exploit sectarian sentiments and misuse the people's property. Moreover, the external forces who felt threatened by the weakening of the putschist clique, and Saudi-Arabia in particular, egged on the opposition to the proposal, because a free Eritrean platform would deny foreign intervention in Eritrean affairs.

Undaunted by the initial rejections and interference, the EPLF continued to clarify the contents of its proposal and to maintain contacts. At the meeting of 15 November 1982, the PLF C.C. leadership endorsed the EPLF proposal. But since the group was interested in genuine unity, it lost no time to send a message contradicting its acceptance of the proposal and starting a campaign against it. By then it had already entered into an agreement with the third faction of the split ELF—"Teyar". It also joined the alliance—later known as the Jeddah agreement—which was formed under Saudi auspices and pressure. While the PLF C.C. was in its midst of its campaign to isolate the EPLF, a meeting between the two organizations was held in Mogadishu at the behest of the Somalia government. There, the EPLF explained that the PLF C.C. in addition to

anti EPLF crusade, did not abide by any agreement it had signed, and that there for, there was no basis for any agreement. But the EPLF also expressed its desire to maintain contact and enter into an agreement if future developments warranted it. At Mogadishu, the PLF-C.C hypocritically condemned the Jeddah agreement and expressed its desire for closer relations with the EPLF. Later on 21, December 1983, at the Kuwait meeting, the PLF-C.C proposed meeting of all Eritrean organizations to which Arab league representative would be invited, and it even suggested that both the EPLF and it self-take action on their take action on their opposition to Saudi interference and send the Saudi government a protest memorandum. Hardly had a week elapsed before PLF-CC leaders went to Saudi Arabia, renounced the agreements they signed with the EPLF in Kuwait as well as their pledges and resumed their former stance and anti EPLF campaigns. Consequently, the EPLF stopped its dialogue with this group.

On another front,EPLF contacts with the largest ELF group, the ELF (central command), commonly known as “Sagim” continued. In their analysis of prevailing conditions, both organizations concluded that the “Jeddah agreement” was an externally manipulated, anti-national and anti-unity pact that also had the support of the Sudanese security department. They agreed to jointly oppose the “Jeddah agreement” and strength their cooperation. When the ELF-CC which had been confined in Sudanese garrison returned to the liberated areas, mutual cooperation began in earnest. After the ELF-CCs conference which was held at the beginning of December 1984, dialogue and implementation of joint task continued, systematically. At successive meeting the EPLF and ELF-CC agreed to make a comparative study of their programs and other policy issue, begin joint political campaigns, execute joint military tasks, and to cooperate in the economic, social and other fields. In the process, common views developed, differences were trashed out, and suspicious eliminated and mutual confidence grew and was steeled by mutual sacrifices paid in joint military activities. This relationship, entered on the basis free will and sense of responsibility, succeeded in two years in creating common ground for joint struggle and thus the question of the merger of the two organizations emerged as a timely demanded. Various proposals were put forward and it was finally agreed that the unity be finalized congress. As the EPLF was preparing for its second congress, it was agreed that its new program and constitution, on which both organizations shared a common view, be studied by both organizations. Finally, final drafts of the documents were prepared after through discussions by the rank and file. When all outstanding issues (of outlook and joint tasks) were settled, the ELF-CC proposed a merger as there was no more justification for continuation of the status quo. And as a first step in the historic process of establishing a broad national democratic front, the integration of fighters of both organizations was completed in the field, to be followed by the unity of the mass organizations.

The EPLF and ELF Central Commands relationship and the very high level it attained prove that if those Eritrean forces with the will and interest to preserve in the national struggle work is unison without any foreign interference, conduct through-going discussions on all political issues, and participate in joint task that require a high level of dedication and sacrifice, they

National unity and formation of a broad National Democratic Front (Part IV)

Written by Million Eyob

could eliminate suspicion and enmity and work for the liberty and reconstruction of Eritrea united in a single front. Viewed against the background of previous efforts made for unity as well as the flopped attempts by intervening foreign powers to bring a merger of opportunistic and bankrupt anti-national forces, the EPLF Sagim unity is a great victory in the struggle to establish a united national front.

Another group that deserves mention is the ELF-RC (Teyar), an organization that first appeared after the 1982 putsch in the ELF. Initially its members agreed to work in cooperation with the EPL-CC, but, before long, most of them abandoned the idea and began to operate on their own. The EPLF tried to foster relations with this organization as well. At the initial contacts, the EPLF's previous reservation as implied in the 1983 declaration on "fifth columnists" were raised and agreement was reached to clarify them in future meetings. Later, formal meetings were held in Khartoum, the field and finally Port Sudan and international, regional and national issues as well as the question of unity were discussed. A program for preliminary joint task was also drawn up. Although the overall orientation talks is positive, it is evident that the relationship has not progressed as was hoped for. Be that as it may, the EPLF has been patiently and earnestly working to improve its relationship with "Teyar".

Another organization is called the ELF-PLF united organization. This organization was part of the alliance that was formed after the ELF putsch by faction of the ELF (Teyar) and the PLF-CC. Just after Teyars split and while the Jeddah agreement as being cooked, the ELF-PLF united organization came out against the agreement and dissociated itself from it. as a result, it has been harassed by Sudanese security. The EPLF continued previously existing contacts with the group had provided assistance to alleviate its temporary difficulties. More recently, leaders of both organizations met to formalize the relationship add joint committee were set up to continue the process.

The disruptive interference of foreign forces chiefly Saudi Arabia should be viewed in contrast with these measures that leads towards genuine national unity. In order to frustrate the EPLF's coalition proposal and its call for the formation of a national council, Saudi Arabia brought the three anti nationalist factions- the ELF pushiest clique, PLF-CC and PLF-RC under the banner of a united organization. The three set up what they called a "National Council". After the fall of Numeirir regime, whose security apparatus was instrumental in propping up this anti-nationalist alliance, its internal unity wakened, its "Fifth columnist" nature was exposed and finally disintegrated. But Saudi Arabia, whose desire to interfere in Eritrean affair's has not slackened, it at present, trying to re-organize opportunist and anti-national elements.

This does not exhaust the developments that took place in the struggle for a single national

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front as it is only discusses EPLF contacts and relationships with organizations. Another significant development has been the step taken by many nationalist elements who were previously active members of, or associated with, previous organizations individually or in groups join to the EPLF after exposing the nature and lines of the anti-nationalist leaders. The increase in the flow of such elements into the ranks in the EPLF is an additional indication of the trend that the struggle between effort to build unity based on a correct national line and the interest groups of anti-nationalist has taken.