Ghidey Zeratsion: Credit and Censure Where They Are Due!

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Prior to 1975, the people of Tigray in North Ethiopia were under persistent attack by both hostile nature and unjust successive governments with a policy of discrimination. Nature continually denied its rainfall from the skies of Tigray, resulting in recurrent droughts, with all its vicious effects. Coupled with it, the failure of the past governments to discharge their responsibilities of setting up a sound early warning and disaster prevention systems caused famine and consequently mass death. It was amidst these trying times that a group of concerned university students and other pro-change personalities teamed up to pave the way forward by establishing a clandestine national democratic movement.

Following Derg’s grip of power and subsequent prohibition of civil and political rights by proclamation, the clandestine association decided to wage a guerilla war. Ten members of the association declared the formal launching of the armed struggle from Dedebit in mid-February of 1975. Ghidey Zeratsion (hereafter called Ghidey), the subject of this piece, was one of the ten, on the one hand and the only one on the other hand. No wonder, the nine members of the group had moral and historical obligation to launch the liberation struggle as they were all natives to the local population and the society would expect them do so. As a non-native of the region, Ghidey’s only motivation to join the group was his personal goodwill and sympathy for the people of Tigrai.

Both of Ghidey’s parents, who then were living in Tigray, are natives of Eritrea, which until 1991 was under the Ethiopian administration. Some 13 years earlier to the commencement of the Tigrean armed movement, the Eritrean guerrilla fighters had already launched a struggle of their own for independence to which Ghidey could have contributed immensely. However, Ghidey, the then revolutionary, chose to fight for the people in an area to which he had no any pedigree, which I believe it is a political noble act and which I would dare give a lot of credit for. As much as Ghidey chose to devote his life for the cause of the Tigrean people by his own goodwill, the people also reciprocated by offering him their special respect to the scale that the native founders of the TPLF did not enjoy. As a manifestation of their unreserved respect, the fighters perceived Ghidey on par with the revolutionary internationalist and nicknamed him “Che Guevara”, after the world renowned Argentine revolutionary, whose concern and devotion transcended race and geographical boundary.

Enjoying such a preferential respect from the people and the fighters, Ghidey stayed in the bitter struggle until he was deposed from his leadership position due to internal differences in ideology and military strategy. To explain his outlook, Ghidey (representing few) had an axe to grind debate in a free stage where representative fighters were summoned for the occasion in order to give their final verdict, after hearing both sides. The audience was given the mandate to promote the winners to leadership positions and demote the losers to a lower level. Ghidey was confronted by a group of young fighters who emerged with the slogan “Let the capable run, the unable walk and the stubborn get uprooted!” The group, which attracted the attention of the vast majority, reflected the way out of the stalemate the struggle faced for a couple of years and won unequivocally against Ghidey’s group. The group of generally young fighters that replaced Ghidey and co. brought about a profound transformation and the daring military advances following that were staggering. For the new leaders in command, it took only two years to fully control the Tigray region, and thereafter only 3 years to completely wipe out the Derg regime from the entire country. This swift victory proved the anxiety and frustration manifested on the fighters with regard to the poor progress of the struggle under the leadership of Ghidey and his group was just and genuine, to say the least.
Ghidey, who was then relegated to a position at the fringes of the guerrilla hierarchy found it hard to accept his new status. He rather ventured to stay in the field convincing individual fighters to his ideological line in a bid to establish his own splinter organization. He thought to form an organization that fights against the Derg under a united front with the TPLF. He naively attempted to recruit fighters from the mother organization, the TPLF, a case which was harshly opposed by the leadership of TPLF and by all fighters in the rank and file. The fighters refuted his attempt by posing “how can you convince us individually on a case you failed to get the hearts and minds of the majority in a formal debate?” Lastly, Ghidey gave up and decided to abandon the struggle instead of serving as a subordinate.

As he announced his decision to leave for good, probably for the first time in the history of the TPLF, a formal honorable discharge was allowed to the guerilla leader. Imagine the risk it could pose to the fate of the guerilla movement if Ghidey was to reveal the secrets he knew to the Derg and the then Soviets! Finally, Ghidey departed for the Sudan with a few fighters escorting him all the way up to the border. In addition, Ghidey was allotted a lump sum of money for food and transportation until he reached Khartoum, where he was received by the UNHCR. Under the leadership of Ghidey, Aregawi and others there was zero tolerance to any kind of dissent. Those who dared to leave had to only do it in hiding, and if found, would face draconian punishment. Such a smooth and dignified departure was unheard of and totally unthinkable. So far so good! Ghidey left the comfort of his home and stood for a just cause, and led the struggle as much as he could. Of course he entertained fallacies reasoning in his disagreement with fellow fighters. And I can live with the fact that he abandoned the struggle at a critical period. That was absolutely his right, which I don’t dare to comment on, but give due credit instead!

**Ghidey Zeratsion in Norway**

Here is where I can hardly offer a positive account, as a matter of fact. Ghidey seems to have taken a U-turn in Norway. One would normally expect him to embark on expounding the very ideas that caused him to leave the armed struggle. But, what happened is rather the contrary. Soon after he landed in Norway as a political refugee, Ghidey befriended his former enemies and formed a new organization together with them. It is to be noted that EPRA, the armed wing of EPRP, was ejected out of Tigray by TPLF, the very organization founded by Ghidey and his compatriots. His ambition of being at the helm of any available organization at any cost was realized when Ethiopian Forum (hereafter Forum) was founded in the premises of the University of Oslo, where Ghidey was enrolled as a student. Given his background as the former leader of their enemy organization, the TPLF, the co-founders of Forum have been wary of him and never considered him as one of their own.

He tried to make up for his predicament as an intruder through bearing the whole burden of doing all the organizational work without any assistance from others. He assumed the role of chairmanship, secretary and public relations in order to impress the members and be accepted as one of them. He was desperately working to keep the organization going, although the rest of the members were staying on only reluctantly. His main purpose was to travel far and wide across the capitals of Europe and participate in various conferences and seminars as a representative of an organization irrespective of its size or viability. The whole purpose of this effort was to appear as somebody with an organization behind, and someone to reckon with.

Where does Ghidey get all this energy and passion from? What is his major political mission in life? The answer to these questions is to be found in that fateful hour back during the guerrilla days when Ghidey’s ideas about the struggle were decisively defeated in a free and open debate. Vendetta! His main mission in life is to get even with the then TPLF leaders who unmasked the deficiency of his ideology in front of hundreds of comrades-in-arms.
Members of the Forum knew that Ghidey’s main objective had nothing to do with the interests of the Ethiopian people. For them, Ghidey himself was the mastermind behind the war between the EPRA and the TPLF, even though facts on the ground reveal that the EPRA initiated the conflict. In any case, the people at Forum decided that it was time for him to go. As a result, they elected somebody else in his place. History repeated itself. For the second time in his life, the “internationalist” who attempted to lead two organizations on opposite camps was deposed once again.

The next marionette organization to be used as a launching pad of Ghidey’s political acrobatics was Tigray Alliance for National Democracy (TAND). Take notice of how Ghiday can easily morph from a national (ethnic-based) movement, TPLF, to a multinational organization like Forum and back to a national one like TAND. Aregawi Berhe, Ghiday Zeratsion and few others who left the TPLF established this organization in order to fulfill their own egomaniacal objectives. The organization remained toothless and programless because of the sinister and egocentric motives of its founders. Ghiday travelled across the length and breadth of Europe representing TAND with the sole purpose of demonizing the struggle of the Tigrean people. TAND was nothing but a Trojan horse manned by Ghiday and a few others to create the image of the Tigrai people as the oppressor nation in Ethiopia. How ironic for a member of an organization, which is supposed to uphold the interest of the Tigrean people, namely TAND, to deprecate the very constituency that he claims to represent or fight for!

**Ghidey’s comeback to Tigreans**

In 2003, the Tigrean Association in Norway made successive discussions amongst its members and new interested compatriots on organizational strengthening by adapting a charter, ethical guidelines and conducting an election afresh. The charter became more democratic and accommodative and embraced all Tigreans and none-Tigraeans regardless of political, religious or other affiliations. Those that were not from Tigrai could, thus, be Ethiopians that honor the people of Tigray and any foreigner that supports the cause, objective and rules of the association as stipulated in the charter. At that time, Ghidey was in his hibernation with his TAND nearly dead and his Forum had already evaporated into thin air.

Hence, in summer 2004, he earnestly requested to take part in the Tigrean association as he found the charter more democratic and workable. Present were a group of five including myself. Finally, we agreed that the charter does not exclude him as long as he refrains from standing against the people of Tigrai. He even expressed remorse and made an earnest promise to leave the past behind and socialize with the Tigrai Diaspora. He confirmed to us that he had already detached himself from the unholy alliance of anti-Tigrai groupings he was wining and dining with. We explained to him that we had no objection even if he entertained political view diametrically opposed to that of ours, provided that he did not continue his dangerous frame up of the people of Tigrai in particular and the Ethiopian people in general.

Ghidey, thus, signed and filled out the membership form, despite opposition by some of our members. He participated in few meetings and took part in the celebration of “Lekatit 11” twice! With such a courageous move, he showed those who sidelined him into lonely being that he really belonged to an association and a social group with whom he shared a common language and culture. During his stay with the Tigrai Association, he discovered that nobody would share his politics of vendetta. A community life free of conflict, animosity, and intrigue was very monotonous to him. Then came the year 2005 where he needed to break the monotony and fish in a disturbed sea. In the Ethiopian Community meeting, which was called days after the 2005 election related violence, Ghidey instigated a feud between some Tigrigna speakers that attended the meeting and other
compatriots who came prepared to attack them physically. Thus, after a thorough democratic deliberation, the Tigrean Association took a disciplinary measure and officially suspended Ghidey for an indefinite period for violating the condition on which he was admitted as its member in the first place. History once again repeated itself for the third time!

**Ghidey’s golden days**

After Ghidey repeatedly failed to get the attention of Tigrean-Ethiopians in the Diaspora, by his long-outdated politics, he escalated his polarization from the small Diaspora group to the general Tigrean-Ethiopian interest. At times, he went extra miles to get an approving gesture from those he thought do hate Tigrai origin Ethiopians, by employing some unacceptable means he did not believe in deep down in his heart. Even though he is normally unwelcome in the camp of hate, due to his past history and origin, there were golden sensational days he used as an opportunity to impress some simpletons who have difficulty to distinguish temporary political events from long term national interests.

Ghidey’s golden times were usually those days when contradictions amongst fellow countrymen skyrocket due to contemporary political or social upheavals like that of 2005. When such occurrences flare up, naturally, division follows in the Ethiopian Diaspora. Right after the violence that followed the 2005 election, Ghidey came out of his shell and started to promote the cause of the then KINJIT party (RIP). KINJIT clearly stood against the security of the people of Tigrai, the constitutional ethnic federalism and above all the right of self determination for nations and nationalities, the very ideas Ghidey co-formulated with his ex-comrades and struggled for.

In Oslo, until summer 2005, it was customary amongst the Ethiopian Diaspora to discuss issues, when major occurrences take place at home. In such gatherings, Ghidey had the habit of transforming himself into a rabble-rouser taking sides with those he thought were against most Tigeans. After the 2005 election related violence, the Ethiopian Community summoned a meeting, which was meant to discuss on a report of its own activity (none-political). During the meeting, two individuals asked for a condemnation of the Ethiopian government for those killed in the violence. Some of the participants suggested that the community organization had no mandate to make such political statements. Ghidey, thus, got another opportune moment to prove his loyalty to those who didn’t take him seriously. He barked until he disrupted the discussion and tried to manipulate the situation into sectarian violence.

Prior to the meeting, he was disseminating false news that those responsible for the violent episode during the protest demonstration were all Tigrigna speakers belonging to a law enforcement unit known as “Agazi”. It is to be recalled that even the then commander of “Agazi”, Colonel Alebel Amare, is not from Tigrai and there is no army unit what so ever in Ethiopia that belongs to the same ethnic group. The same ex-commander is now in Eritrea leading an armed group called Amhara Democratic Movement that is meant to fight the Ethiopian Government. This being the real case, Ghidey tried to imply that the confrontation between the government and the demonstrators was rather a conflict between Tigrigna speakers and the rest of Ethiopians, thereby giving it the character of a dangerous ethnic onslaught.

The violence got settled when one of the respected elders of the community, Ato Yussuf Yassin intervened and cooled down the confrontation before it got out of control. I personally laud him for helping abort Ghidey’s instigation of a bloody feud among Ethiopian in Norway. Politics aside, Ato...
Yussuf deserves credit for trying to bring together Ethiopians of differing political persuasions under one Community, though still unsuccessful.

Ghidey for sure knows that he lures few hate mongers in order to get a social niche by using his demagogy. At least two cases of such sorts had happened in Oslo where Ghidey failed in the first instance, in 1999. However, as stated above he almost continues to succeed since the post-election hype of 2005, as his idea perfectly matched the exclusionary interests of the then KINUJT-diehards who later turned to Ginbot 7 thugs. This understandable gap that still exists in the Diaspora has become a fertile ground for his machinations.

God denied only success to Ghidey, not a work to be done or a distance to travel! In the recent past, by a stroke of luck, there came an invitation to all Diaspora Ethiopian political and civic organizations to the Ottawa conference for the purpose of forming a new political alliance from old “spare parts”. Ghidey saw in it a golden opportunity to climb the ladder of diaspora political hierarchy. This time he had no desire to attend the conference representing an ethnic-based organization like TAND (RIP). His choice was some kind of civic organization. He dug deep into the Norwegian Register Centre and found a forgotten Ethiopian discussion group that was established by some interested Ethiopians back in 2005 and which was officially registered as an association in 2007. This group has been inactive for many years because it was weakened and swallowed up by the emerging political support organizations. Somehow, Ghidey became the leader of this dead association and headed to the conference in Ottawa, Canada representing this “civic organization” without any mandate from anyone.

The conference took place between the 19th and the 21st of May, 2012. This was a conference when Ghidey was in his most jovial mood. Like a naughty child, he seemed to be giggling and proud of his cunning political maneuvers.

![Ghidey in the Ottawa conference, second from left.](image)

**Futile threat in a country of freedom, justice and equity**

These days, Ghidey is encouraging futile lawsuit against Tigray origin Diaspora in Norway, blaming them as spies for the Ethiopian Government, simply because they refute his politics of vengeance. Those that refuse to join him in his actions become immediate targets and he is hell-bent to seeing to it that their residence permits are revoked for reasons of being supporters and spies for the Ethiopian government.

Ghidey rarely comes to the forefront to justify his views on Ethiopian politics. Exploiting his background as a former guerrilla leader and his chairmanship of Forum that died soon after birth, he came in contact with a number of Norwegian activists like his buddy Rune Berglund Steen of the Norwegian Antiracist Center. Ghidey’s understanding of Ethiopian politics is, thus, streamlined to the Norwegian public through Berglund Steen and others in the name of “political experts on Ethiopian affairs” with a brand of “information from independent sources”, and not from the figment of Ghidey’s own revenge ridden twisted imagination.
Through his proxy contacts, he has always been providing the Norwegian public and authorities unsolicited false information that undermines the refugee status of asylum seekers of Tigrai origin. He has been busy trying to inculcate in the minds of some Norwegians and other Ethiopians the image of Tigrean Diaspora as hired agents of the Ethiopian Government simply due to their rejection of his politics.

His attempt time and again to get the present writer deported from Norway failed and now he is back to using my article www.aigaforum.com/articles/Moral-Crises-Norwegian-Anti-Racism-Center2.pdf for this same business. As any reader of the article can understand, I am solely defending my people and their just anti-Derg struggle with hard facts. He then uses a false premise to implicate me as a spy of the Ethiopian government/ruling party. I would like to assure Ghidey that if defending my people with facts is spying, I will do it over and over again for the rest of my life. From his end the “honorable judge” Ato Ghidey has decided that I should get back home. Bereft of the possibility of ever becoming a real judge himself, he will be working behind guilelessly trusting Norwegians who have no clue of Ethiopian politics or Ghidey’s motives. The blessing though is, we are in a country that enjoys the best justice system in the world. Ghidey has been able to blindfold a significant number of innocent Ethiopians and few hate mongers among the Ethiopian Diaspora. However, he cannot do the same to Norwegian institutions, which make use of state of the art technology to obtain information about any foreign elements engaged in subversive and criminal activities like spying on Norwegian soil.

Dear Ghidey, my article should have rather helped you to pause for a moment and reflect on what you have been doing with your life and the lives of the people you come in contact with. If the article has pinched you a little and is able to wake you up to your senses, then it has served its purpose. To me this would be a bonus to the satisfaction I gain defending the very people that you fought for in your tender age. It should not have provoked you to instigate a court case against me behind the scenes. I feel proud and privileged to defend the people I am from. I can go to any lengths to undo the campaign waged against my people and in this regard, my limit is nowhere, but the sky.

Finally, I feel sorry to share my readers the tragic story of a former hero who was once christened “Che Guevara” and who finally became a pale shadow of himself.

Yibabe