

Isaias Afworki: Spy or a revolutionary

We have been trying for years to reach whether Isaias Afworki 1) was recruited by the CIA to join the ELF and help to dismantle it ('Operation seed planting project' as Wedi Giorgio referred to it; 2) Whether he was recruited by Asrate Medhin Kassa (Governor of Eritrea : 1964 - Dec 1970), on the behalf of Ethiopia for the same purpose, with the implicit role of the Mossad. Asrate Kassa was born 1922 and died 1974. Now there is new information that strengthen the possibility that he was a spy. One thing we know for sure. Tesfamichael Giorgio brought Isaias to Asmara and took him to Kagnaw Station and he was imprisoned by the Ethiopians, for it. The following are the old and new facts:

- Tesfamichael Giorgio, has detailed how Isaias had come to Asmara and how he had contacts with the CIA, which we knew about since he joined the ELF in 1974, which he also detailed in the Massawa symposium organized by the Dergue in 1982. The reasons given by Wedi Giorgio for the interest of the CIA in Isaias was that they and possibly, the Mossad, considered the ELF as an organization with strong ties to the Arab countries and they were keen that the Red Sea will not come fully under the control of the Arabs. Tesfamichael Giorgio was killed by the EPLF in Addis in 1992. Hirui Tedla Bairu has the transcript of the original interview of the ELF with Wedi Giorgio, but has so far declined to release it to the public. For English details check this link: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2015/01/on-how-cia-recruited-isayas-afeworki-in.html> and you find the Amharic and Tigrinya and Arabic versions on this link: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2015/12/tesfamichael-giorjo-on-isaias.html>
- Erlich Haggai, the Israeli writer, who may have links to the Mossad, tried to promote Isaias in his book, "The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 – 1978" published 1983. He claims, " One of the most spectacular terrorist acts of the time was performed by a young school teacher, Isayas Afawarq (b. 1946), an important leader of the now defunct Tripartite Union...On the 14th of April 1970, in a bar in downtown Asmara, Isayas machine-gunned two ex-judges who had sentenced some ELF guerrillas to death....Isayas fled Asmara, and in the districts of Hamassein and seraye, together with some 8 young commanders (notably his associates Ibrahim Tewald and Irmiyas Debessau), he managed to organize a group of few hundred Christian warriors." (page 39). He further claims, "Then on 21 November, 1970, Maj. Gen. Ergetu Tshome, the Commander of the armed forces in Eritrea, was assassinated by Isayas's men, in a carefully executed ambush." (page 29). But we know that Isaias was not a teacher and he never operated as Fedayeen and the operation that killed the commander of the 2nd Ethiopian army division was carried out by the ELF, not by Isaias's men, who split from the ELF

Haggai in his book details how Asrate Kassa, Governor then, had close relations to Israel and with their support he built in 1965, the 'Commandos', or '101'. By the end of 1965 it was a battalion-size unit comprising nine superbly trained companies. Its central base was Dekemhare, where the recruits mostly Christian Eritreans – were trained by the Israelis. It was also known as the 'Governor's private army.' He writes, "Asrate Kassa, who saw Islam as the main enemy of Ethiopian nationalism, seems to

have initiated the anti-Muslim campaign. He had long tried to orient Ethiopia's regional policy on Israel, and Israeli advisors were almost permanent guests in his Asmara Palace. Israeli victory in the six days war contributed significantly in Asrate Kassa's growing influence. Following his advice, the Emperor consented to a more flexible policy in troubled Eritrea. A general amnesty was proclaimed, Christian Tigreans considered loyal to the Government were armed, and Asrate Kassa met with religious functionaries to persuade them to encourage their followers to cooperate with the Government... By the end of 1967, some one hundred rebels, including an important Christian leader, had surrendered." He states that that campaign of massacring the population and the burning of villages in coincided with return from the Adobha meeting of the fighters of the defunct Tripartite Union, the establishment of the PLF, and the beginning of the activities of the Isayas Afawarq's men, who did their utmost to retaliate and even take the initiative (P. 40 – 41). For more information check: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2015/08/how-haggai-erlich-promoted-isaias.html>

- There was a Yemeni guy who lived in Agordat that I knew him. He who used to sell 'peanuts' at bus station in Agordat and travelled also to other towns such as Barentu and Tessenei. He was known by the name 'Sukker bu dibu, Maaer budibu' - meaning there is sugar and honey in it in, in Tigrait. He used to say this when he sold his products. He disappeared after a period. It later emerged that he did not allow any one to his tukul in Agordat and some Eritreans who went to Israel later, found him there as an Israeli officer, very probably he was a Jew, a Mossad agent spying on their behalf.
- General Daniel Mengistu who was the Foreign Affairs security chief of Ethiopia during Haile Sellasie stated in an interview with an Ethiopian Newspaper, in 2000 has claimed that Isaias was an Ethiopian spy and on the payroll of Ethiopia. For the full interview read here: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2017/12/ethiopia-general-daniel-mengistus-claim.html>
- Haile Woldetensae details in his interview with Dan Connell, "Conversations with Eritrean prisoners," in 2000 states that he and Isaias had a clandestine group, when they joined the ELF and their intention was to form their own organization. And until they form their own organization, the aim was particularly to dissuade Eritrean highlanders not to join the ELF, and to let those who were already recruited to leave the organization and go to Ethiopia to pursue their studies, until further notice. Durue joined the ELF and after 8 months defected together with 18 others to Ethiopia. Most of the fighters who surrendered to the enemy were his class mates in Prince Mekonen Secondary school and most of them have been in the ELF for just few months. Most probably Durue and his colleagues may have not been aware of the motives and plans of Isaias. Ironically Musie was killed by Isaias and the whereabouts of Durue is unknown. For details check: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2017/06/1967-circumstances-under-which-elf.html> . For the Durue interview with Dan Connell, Tigrinya translation check from 15 min: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKa5uN4dvE4&t=3018s>
- The son of Asrate Kassa, Mulugeta, has confirmed few days ago, December 11, 2017 that his father, has recruited Isaias Afworki with the knowledge of Emperor Haile

Sellasie and the then prime minister, Aklilu Habte wold to join the ELF and dismantle it from within. He further states that those days it was the norm to work with the CIA and Mossad. Mulugeta Asrate Kassa further confirmed (an information we had) that Isaias came to see his father when he was hospitalized in a hospital in East London in 1970/1971.

We know that after the Adobha Conference of 1969, Isaias Afworki, and Saleh Fikak who were members of the Revolutionary Command were sent by the leadership to the highlands in February 1970 for political mobilization. Shortly afterwards Isaias with few Christian highlanders split and remained in the highlands. We also know that another split group from the ELF held a conference in Sidoho Eila, Dankalia 24 June to 2 July 1970. And announced the formation of the PLF-ELF and they were known as PLF 1. Isaias and his group allied themselves with PLF 1, in March 1970 and at the end of June 1971 Isias's group moved to Dankalia and met with PLF 1 at Emba Hara. In **January 1972** both groups sent representatives to meet with Sabbe and the Obel group, in **Beirut**.

From PLF 1, the representatives were Ramadan Mohamed Nur and Ali Saeed Abdella, from the Isaias group the representatives were Isaias Afworki and Mesfin Hagos. It was the first time that we know about that Isaias travelled abroad. Ahmed Tahir Baduri, in his book 'Eritrea: A Memory Journey', in Arabic (pages 171 – 172) details that Sabbe sent Naizghi Kiflu, who was in Beirut to the field to invite PLF 1 and the Isaias group, known as Alla group for the meeting. Sabbe also invited the Obel group who were represented by Saleh Shatir and Osman Agiib. On the other hand Sabbe, also invited personally several other fighters from both groups, who were not representatives.

Those included Mohamed Ali Omaro, Mohamed Omer Abu Teiara, Omer Mohamed Damir and Mahari Debessai. which raised a representation conflict when all arrived in Beirut. The PLF 1 and the Alla group coordinated their position and insisted to meet with the General Secretariat (Amana Amma) alone. Those from the General Secretariat that were present in the meeting were Osman Sabbe, Woldeab Woldemariam, Omer Mohamed Buruj, Taha Mohamed Nur, and Mohamed Saeed Naoud. The picture below gives an indication of those who attended the Beirut meeting. It must have been during this trip to Beirut that Isaias travelled to meet Asrate Kassa in London. Why on earth would Isaias who was a fighter in the field would visit Asrate Kassa? This was on the comments section of the following post, of mine, at the Horn of Africa photos on 11 December, 2017



Beirut :January 1972: Taken when Isaias visited Beirut standing from left: Naizghi Kiflu, Gebre Medhin Zaid, Mesfin Hagos , Sitting: Woldeab Woldemariam and Isaias Afwerki.



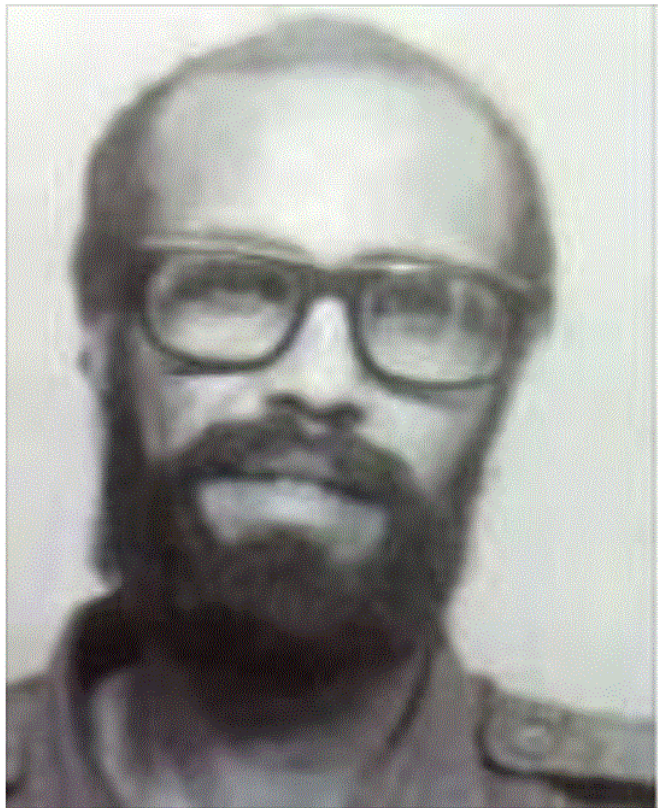
Mohamed Kheir Omer is with Jelal Yassin and Kebede Hile Mikael.

11 December at 15:03

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25 years ago, 13 April 1992, Tesfamichael Giorgio was assassinated by EPLF death squads in Addis Ababa. His only crime was that he was one of the first who spoke against Isaias Afworki exposing his link to Asrate Kassa, the then Governor of Eritrea and to the CIA and how they supported 'Selfi Nasenet' that split from the ELF in 1969. Wedi Giorgio joined the ELF were he first exposed the links. And we are still searching for the original au...

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Comment



Mustafa Mohammad Mahmoud, Endalamaw Aberra and 62 others



Mulugeta Asrate Kassa My comment may be brushed aside as "blood is thicker than water." Anyway here is my take, in a capsule form, on the link between my father, Leuel Ras Aserate Kassa, the then Governor General of Eritrea, and Isaias Afewerki. My father succeeded his cousin Lt. General Abiye Abebe, whose Governorship witnessed the dismantling of Eritrea's federal structures. This measure by the Imperial Government, who refused to have two types of governance in one nation, soon led the fledgling ELF to upgrade its opposition to Ethiopian rule by throwing bomb at a rally where General Abiye Abebe was speaking. He was slightly injured. It was against this backdrop that my father assumed his onerous duty of 'pacifying' Eritrea. My father soon realised that it was near impossible to govern Eritrea the way other Ethiopian provinces were governed. The gist of his argument was that Eritreans have had a relative exposure to modernity and to job opportunities than was the case of other Ethiopians. His "friendly, but firm" approach boiled down to a carrot and stick policy. My father strongly advocated for continuing to build on the economic successes of Eritrea by encouraging inward investment. On the other hand the full weight of the law was going to be meted out on those "bandits" who turned their backs on the Emperor's Amnesty. These two pronged approach to the Eritrean Question then constituted Aserate Kassa's tenure of office in Asmara.

Having stated this, I now want to remind you that in those days the architects and advisors of Ethiopia's domestic and foreign intelligence were Israelis from Mossad. Acting on the advice of Mossad and the recommendation of Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold, the Emperor ordered my father to establish contact with Isaias Afewerki. The purpose was to navigate him through the choppy waters of guerrilla warfare to annihilate the ELF.

Like · Reply · 5 · 6 hrs · Edited

Like · Reply · 4 hrs



Mohamed Kheir Omer Thank you very much for confirming the contacts, a question remains did Isaias visit your father when he was at Chapel Hill hospital in London around 1970/71

Like · Reply · 44 mins



Mulugeta Asrate Kassa Mohamed Kheir Omer

With all due respect, when or where my father met Isaias is neither here nor there. As I stated in my earlier commentary every contact my father had with Isaias was fully sanctioned by the Emperor and Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold. To answer your question, yes Isaias did visit my father at the London Hospital in East London around 1970-1971.

Like · Reply · 35 mins

- Dawit Woldeghiorgis¹, had this to say about Tesfamichael Giorgio, in 2015, in a post in Zehabesha.com, he wrote “ Tesfa Mikael Giorgio is the son of a very famous Ethiopian (Eritrean) Dejazmatch Giorgis (popularly called Giorgio). He was one of the founders of ‘Hager Fikir Mahber.’ For him Ethiopia was a sacred biblical name and place which is indivisible. He believed that Eritrea’s union with Ethiopia is a divine wish which cannot be challenged. It was a privilege to have known such a personality when I was serving in Eritrea as a special force army officer. Dejazmatch Giorgio was buried in Akrur in Segneiti Wereda. I attended his funeral. One of his sons, Belay Giorgio is a third course graduate from the Military academy. He was a colonel and a medical doctor in the Ethiopian army at the time Weyane took over Ethiopia. Tesfa Mikael was the youngest but the most politicised of his children. He was ‘wreda geji’ of Dekemehari. At some point, because of a problem that cannot be explained in this brief note, he defected to the EPLF. He later defected from the EPLF and joined the ELF. When I went to Eritrea as governor he secretly contacted me and sent a message expressing his willingness to return but needed assurance that he will not be persecuted or prosecuted. I did give him that assurance and he finally returned. He was working in my office and during the Red Star campaign was involved in the preparation of propaganda material. He therefore was working closely with Bealu Girma as well. Tesfa Mikael Giorgio was killed by the EPLF in Addis, as described by Afendi.” On his speculation about the characters of Bealu Girma’s novel ‘Oromai’, he further adds ,” Silay is Tesfa Mikael Giorgio but includes some aspect of Teklai, the EPLF central committee member who had defected earlier.” For details, check: <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2015/08/dawit-wolde-woldegiorgis-on-key-kokeb.html>

In a recent, personal communication with me, Dawit Woldeghiorgis states, “As a fresh graduate from the military academy I was assigned to Asmara about a year before the federation was dissolved. Because one of the sons of Dej Giorgio was a friend and an officer I was close to the family from my early years in Asmara. I became a friend of Tesfa Mikael then. I even went to the funeral of Dej Giorgio in Akrur Segeneiti. I was there when Tesfa Mikael was the Wereda administrator of Dekemhare. I was there when he brought Isaias, as he told me. I would not have known any connection between Asrate Kassa and Tesfa Mikael but personally I do not believe that he had a direct link nor do I believe that Asrate Kassa knew about the adventure of Tesfa Mikael. Tesfa Mikael was too young and too junior to be involved in such high stake drama in a traditional society that had high consideration to age. He was too young to be respected and trusted. It was his own initiative and that is why he was imprisoned . I would have known all military operational activities that took place at the

¹ ** Dawit was a training officer at Mayhaber and Dekemehare for a few years as junior officer. As captain, he was operations and training officer at the army headquarters in Asmara. He joined university in 1968 and used to go back to Eritrea every winter vacation until 1972 when he graduated from the law school. Then he got a scholarship at Columbia university New York. He went back to Ethiopia after the overthrow of Haile Selassie. During the Dergue period he served various positions including Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner and the first Secretary in Eritrea of Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE) and thus Governor of Eritrea 1980 – 1983. He was politically and economically responsible for the “Key-Kokeb” or ‘Red Star’ Zemecha. He defected from the Dergue in 1985. He authored, among others, “Red Tears” and “Kihdet be Dem Meret”

time, as I was the operation officer at the 2nd Infantry division. I was there when he was sent to prison for those actions. Though I was a junior officer, I and my friends played a role to have him released. When I went back as governor he had already joined the ELF. I communicated with him to have him back. It was my personal decision and initiative. I succeeded to bring him back and he was working in my office including during the times of Key Kokeb. He prepared the Massawa symposium speech in my office. I did introduce him at the Massawa Symposium that I organized. When I left Eritrea he did not feel safe. I brought him to Addis and found him a job at the leather corporation. I left at the end of 1985 and he felt very vulnerable as he had many enemies. He was killed, as you know by the EPLF.»

I asked Dawit Woldeghiorgis if he knew about any links between Asrate Kassa and Isaias. He told me he did not know about it. He presumed that by the virtue of his position, he would have known about it, unless it was a top secret that only the higher officials knew about it. He even recalled a top confidential operation that he and only another one knew about where Aniania fighters from Southern Sudan were brought to Asmara by planes and he was responsible for their training until they were sent back to Sudan. But he recalls that he and the army were surprised that Fessahaye Haregot had contacts with the EPLF with the knowledge of senior authorities that they did not know about. Because of the outcry from the troops who protested to their commanders why the son of Haregot Abbay goes unpunished for cooperating with an enemy they are fighting; Fessahaye was symbolically sent to prison for a while. Fessahaye, actually spent a few days in the police HQ with all the comfort he would get from his own place

I asked Dawit also if the correspondence letters that Wedi Giorgio refers to were genuine, he answered he did not check them, but he would not doubt that they were genuine, as Tesfamichael had access to all documents he needed for that Symposium.

Dawit Woldeghiorgis also added, “ We trained all the special forces with the Israelis as advisers One battalion in Mayhabber 34th battalion , Two in Dekemehari 24th and 31st battalion and then the 4th battalion at Azezo, Gondar. One special coomando police unit at Adi Ugri. This was as part of 2nd infantry division. Israelis were training special airborne units at Debra Zeit those times and part of them came to Asmara to advise on the training.”

- We have also searched 1011 declassified confidential documents related to Eritrea released by the CIA, in January 2017. They are part of 13 million such confidential documents released by the CIA , based on the CIA Freedom of Information Act, but to no avail. Perhaps they do not release names of their agents. You check on those documents, if the link is still active on : <https://hedgait.blogspot.no/2017/01/cia-confidential-documents-on-eritrea.html>
- It is known that ‘Selfi Nesanet’, Isias’s split group from the ELF, took weapons from Asmara, in what was described as a bold Fedayeen operation. It has come to our attention that the customs (Finansa) chief, Shambel Kibraab was approached by Tesfayohannes Berhe and/or Asrate Kassa to place a shipment of arms in the store of the customs office and he was told this was very confidential and no one on the customs office should know about it. He was reluctant but had to comply. He was surprised later that a unit of ‘Selfie Natznet’ broke into the store and took the arms few days later. Tesfay Temenew recalls that incident as he was one of those who broke into the customs store and took the arms. They were simply told to go there and collect the weapons. For them it was a Fedayeen operation. Probably most of the fighters in ‘Selfi Nesanet’ did not know Isaias’s links.

As to the conclusion, I leave it to the judgement of the readers. But the search for further evidences will continue, unabated.