

Review

Why Ethiopia survived free from the yoke colonialism? foreign policy justification

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Abstract

Africa suffered from the brutal administration of European colonizers. However, Ethiopia has maintained its independent state survival. Such independence of Ethiopia is attributed to the strong commitment of its leaders and peoples. Most importantly, the foreign policies of the then leaders (Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik) had central place in making such a wonderful history of Ethiopia. Their policies were centered on the preservation of Ethiopian independent state existence.

Keywords: Tewodros, Yohannes, Menelik, Ethiopia, foreign policy, colonialism, independence

INTRODUCTION

Industrial revolution in Europe turned Europeans' face towards Africa for the sake of achieving cheap raw materials and market places. This resulted in the encroachments of foreign powers into Africa and expansion of colonialism. This further resulted in exploitation of domestic resource and change of history of African countries. African states surrendered their sovereignty and subjected to their colonizers. But, Ethiopia comes exceptional and the symbol of independence in Africa. Ethiopian history was "Aryanized" so as to show Ethiopian exception from that of the rest of the African continent (Adejumobi, 2000:31). Ethiopia preserved its independence throughout the period of the European scramble and partition of Africa. Hence, the rest parts of Africa which were colonized by Europeans declare Ethiopia as "a liberator, a monument, and a living exponent and testimony of African political freedom" (ibid: 32). The remarkable independent Ethiopian state survival was secured as a result of different reasons. This paper looks into the role of the then Ethiopian leaders' foreign policies for Ethiopian state survival from the onslaught of European colonialism. Accordingly, it reviews important literatures as to the major features of Ethiopian Foreign policies under

the reigns of Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik in brief.

Why Ethiopia maintained its independent existence from European Colonialism?

The independent survival of Ethiopia from the yoke of colonialism is attributed to different factors. Accordingly, the following factors explain the very reasons of its independence with particular emphasis on the three consecutive leaders since the reign of Emperor Tewodros.

There exists a conviction that strong commitment and unreserved struggle of rulers was the primary reason for Ethiopian state survival (Rubenson, 1978:174). Emperor Tewodros was a strong counter attack to foreigners and their attempt to aggrandize their influence. This was further explained by Crummey (1969:457) as follows: *'It is also relevant here to try to place Tewodros in the context of African response to growing European pressure throughout the nineteenth century'*. Emperor Tewodros unreservedly tried to restrict the spread of European influence as he was well aware of the possible effect of their interference. He was conscious enough about the influence of Europeans as a danger to Ethiopian independent survival. Furthermore, his intention of

creating a single centralized state and the policies he followed to solve the evils of backwardness also explain Ethiopian independent survival (Rubenson, 1978: 269). His policy of establishing salary for military, administrative, judicial, and civil service personnel to run state affairs smoothly and thereby to protect the country from foreign invasion has significant place in the country's independence (Milkias, 2011:48). Thus, he played a great role to the independent survival of Ethiopia and laid down a basic framework to his succeeding rulers.

Emperor Yohannes in his own part was also highly committed to the sovereignty of the country working vigorously against its enemies. He was committed to his religion and, like Tewodros, prohibited any external religious meddling. This was accompanied by the commitment of Ethiopian people to safeguard their religion and their mother land from foreign intrusion (Rubenson, 1978:363). Apart from his diplomatic and military successes, Emperor Yohannes was able to achieve national unity through his policies towards religion and culture. He desired to found religious uniformity across the whole society in favors of Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The whole effect is Emperor Yohannes had successfully defended Ethiopian territorial integrity against a series of foreign invading forces up until his death in Metema (Milkias, 2011:49). Thus, the survival of independent Ethiopia is attributed to those factors.

Emperor Menelik was also highly dedicated ruler for the territorial integrity of Ethiopia against the foreign invasion. He was committed for Ethiopian independent existence in the realization of his foreign policy. It is this strong commitment that led the first skirmish to last in Ethiopian victory (Keller, 2005: 92).

In a nutshell, the independent existence of Ethiopia from the yoke of colonialism is attributed to good quality leadership that could persuade the heroic people of Ethiopia to struggle whole heartedly, by putting aside of their internal differences, to defend the territorial integrity of their mother land (Rubenson, 1978:366). Besides the strong commitment of leaders, the way they mobilize their people created strong commitment on the part of the people thereby contributing to the victory of the country. Ethiopian rulers have consolidated national unity, which accompanied by large population size contributed in successfully defending Ethiopian territorial integrity. Almost all regions of Ethiopia played their part in sending army to the battle especially at the battle of Adwa. Not only these, the possession of arms and ammunitions, which obtained especially from European christen powers, the development of a professional army, and the fostering of ancient powerful religious and political institutions were factors that were also vital in the maintenance of Ethiopian independence (Adejumobi, 2000:32; Keller, 1987: 78-80).

Major Features of Ethiopian Foreign Policies under the Reigns of Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik

The major features of Ethiopian foreign policies under these three successive leaders are briefly explained as follows.

The Foreign Policy of Tewodros

The foreign policy of emperor Tewodros was characterized by modernization of Ethiopia and containment of external encroachments (Rubenson, 1978:173). His policy was aimed at systematically utilizing the knowledge of Europeans so as to modernize the country (ibid, 174). To solve internal problems of backwardness he tried to acquire European assistance to train his people. To this end, he desired to have strong relations with Europeans which can be operated under his own framework. This is also well stated by Adejumobi (2000:26) that to introduce technology he initiated a series of diplomatic contacts with Europe. Diplomacy and mediation were instruments of his foreign policy to enhance his relations with neighbors, and military solution was only as a last resort. Emperor Tewodros's foreign policy has believed to be modern for he believed in an active diplomacy not only for safeguarding national independence but also to improve internal system for modernization and renewal (Crummey, 1969:461). Therefore, it is clear that Tewodros preferred to establish diplomatic relations with European governments to secure their assistance in fighting against foreign threats and for the development of the country. Most importantly, his foreign policy was inspired by making alliances with European christen powers (Britain and France) (Keller, 1987: 78; Adejumobi, 2000:26).

Thus, he was committed for his country's independence in his foreign policy. Let alone allowing encroachment of foreign powers into Ethiopia, Tewodros was the one who was striving for recognition of the equal status of Ethiopia with great powers of the time (Keller, 1987: 78). This shows that he had no room for domination by foreigners. After all, he lost his life for his country's sovereignty.

The Foreign Policy of Yohannes

A more active foreign policy of Yohannes was, like Tewodros, aimed at creating strong relations with the outside world and to use the benefit that can be generated out of it. From the very start, Yohannes faced the first imperialist threat to Ethiopia from Egypt. He was not interested to address external threats through military means. As a result, he tried to solve his threat from Egypt through peaceful means though they remain to be an

aggressive not to comply with his idea. He was highly relied on negotiation and mediation efforts (Rubenson, 1978:301). But, as the result of failure of peaceful mechanism of his foreign policy to promote friendly relations with neighbors, he turned into military oriented policy to attack the enemies particularly Egypt and Sudan. Also, he considered European expansion as a serious threat to Ethiopian independence (Keller, 1987: 79). Generally speaking, Yohannes wanted to have good foreign relations with the external world which can be guided by diplomacy though compelling conditions forced him to prefer war as a last resort to maintain the country's independence.

The Foreign Policy of Menelik

The successor of Yohannes, Menelik, was also employed economic relation with the outside world for the sake of securing arms support of Europeans for maintaining his territory (Caulk 2002:32). As a result of his overall liberal diplomatic relations, military equipments acquired from external supporters such as Russia, French and Britain (Keller, 1987: 79). Russian and French were assisting him through training his military. He was well versed of the tactic of playing one power against the other to secure his country's sovereignty. He was, as compared to the preceding two rulers, more liberal in his foreign relations taking into account the very interest of foreign countries. He also preferred diplomatic mechanisms of resolving issues though compelling situation also forced him to war where he became the victory given the aforesaid factors.

One major commonality in the foreign policy of the three succeeding emperors was that all of them made external contact at the very start of their reign with the

Europeans so as to get legitimate authority and arms support. Later, throughout their period of reign all devoted to have peaceful relations with externals and wanted to get military and technological assistance for the wellbeing of the country. The later tactic of these leaders, though not the only, explains Ethiopia's independent survival from colonialism.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopia has not surrendered its sovereignty to the external colonizers. This wonderful history of Ethiopia has come from the courageous characteristics of its leaders and peoples. Hence, the strong commitment of its people and leaders for the sovereignty of the country as well as its religion and culture explains Ethiopia's independent survival from external evils. Most importantly, the foreign policies of the three leaders of Ethiopia were committed to its independence from external invasions.

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