

ETHIOPIA'S 'SOFT' CRUSADE ON SOMALIA



Image by (unknown)

In East Africa, the damage that ensued the titanic battles between Abyssinia, the Ethiopian Kingdom, and the Adal Sultanate in 1529-43 was not limited to the battlefields but it had damaged Ethiopia's intellectual thoughts towards Somalis, and after almost five centuries, the old sentiment has never subsided and the dictum that Somalia is a part of Ethiopia still reverberates even though the war ended in their favor. In grief, Haile Selassie referred to the Abyssinia-Adal Sultanate war, "...as if these catastrophes had occurred only yesterday, "[1] craving for vengeance that is nothing short of the total disintegration of Somalia. Over the years, Ethiopia had endeavored different methodologies including military might as a means and the old colonial principle of divide and rule to terminate the existence of any Somali political polity.

Under the influence of historical events including the 1968 and 1977 wars, Ethiopia perceives Somalia as a threat to its existence, as a result, it has undermined many reconciliation processes including the Cairo Accord 1997 and the Arta Agreement of 2000. Muhammad Asad has eloquently elucidated this false apprehension in his book, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*; the non-Muslims "...fear at a revival of the Islamic spirit, as manifested in the idea of the Islamic state, might revive the slumbering strength of the Muslims and drive them to new aggressive adventures in the direction of the West." The obstruction towards Islamic polity is not necessarily limited to an Islamic state but anything any that has an Islamic scent. The fear has propelled the Ethiopian government to push its bayonets deeper into Somalia. This is clearly a soft crusade, and the absence of Menelik's Cross-inscribed banners simply means that it had adopted a softer approach but the core creed that instigated Menelik's conquests is still intact.

THE ROOT CAUSE

Good governance was never a national pride but nobody could have predicted that old tribal grudges could have destroyed a nation with such an intensity that overwhelmed the traditional conventions and the religious edicts. Like volcanic eruption, the suffocated tribal sentiments were vehemently released leading to self-rejuvenating problems, though the simmering dissatisfactions are now being discharged at a lower rate and with lesser intensity, this conflict possesses a natural element of unpredictability that could erupt at any time.

Tribalism entraps man's intellect with promptness to fall a prey to any fallacious slogans, however irrational, and the civil war is a prime example where the partakers were goaded with emotionally irresistible fallacies. On 21 October 1969, Siad Barre gained power in a bloodless coup d'état after the assassination of president Sharmarke. A nationalist though he lacked the administrative capacity to lead; his managerial precept was to reward his supporters with favors while opponents were dealt with punitive measures including executions. He built the country's institutions and equally, he perpetrated wide spread cruelties against his own constituents including aerial bombings. Finally, in 1991, he was overthrown by Ethiopian supported tribal rebel groups forcing him into exile. Though these tribal militias were engaged in acts of sacrifice and are often eulogized as martyrs but the impetus was not to benefit the people or the nation, but rather to safeguard extraneous tribal interests and imprudent clannish milestones. And upon gaining the power, they were neither equipped with political skills to govern nor possessed

the humbleness to concede their incompetence, and consequently, their insurgency resulted in mayhem and it laid the foundation for foreign ambitions perhaps without knowing it.

The paramount reason for Somalia's downfall is that the European colonists brought alien principles and they lied the foundation on doctrines that are diametrically contrary to Islamic ideals. And over the years, the distinct and sovereign traditional way of life has been tampered with foreign standards transfiguring it into a derivative version that barely resembles its original form. Hence, the historical way of life has been forsaken and the new scheme has never been fully accommodated leaving us in a gray area that leads Jahiliyah. Disturbing the intrinsic temporal order of people by imposing unfamiliar Western modes of life, despite its outward gadgetry convenience, is unjust and it yields unsolicited effects especially if the recipients and the sponsors are not theologically interrelated; the spiritual deficiencies, the cultural decay, the social regression, and the terrible civil disorder that ensued mirror the incompatibility of the imported protocols.

THE ETHIOPIAN CRUSADE

With the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, Ethiopia's ambitions became more graspable as the restraining obstructs were favorably removed, and the absence of any social and religious agreement among the feuding tribes served as a catalyst for its cause. And as a result, the neighboring countries have interceded in Somalia's affairs as tribal arbitrators and as “peacekeepers” shrewdly exploiting the Somalis' unholy character to their advantage, tribalism, and utilizing political wedges to dismember the nation into smaller dutiful semi-autonomous regions. The formulated scheme has two fronts:

First, military occupation under the cover of terrorism which gives them the political mask and the plausible justification to deploy troops into Somalia alleging to be 'in pursuit of terrorist organizations'. This amorphous contrived expression has the political elasticity to mold its forms according to their interests fittingly and as Muslims, it is extremely difficult to be beyond its denoted characterizations. As Jamal Osman of BBC wrote, Ethiopia dramatically depicts itself as a Christian nation terrorized by its Muslim neighbor, and a loyal willing partner on "War on Terror" specialized in dealing with Somalia's troublesome affairs. Overstepping all the restricting regulations, it has acquired a free rein to propel its private agenda inwardly while

portraying its presence in Somalia as a danger imbued international mission that merits a generous support.

In late 2006, the opportunity presented itself when it was contracted by the US to intervene militarily in support of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) against the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) which controlled much of southern Somalia. The ICU was driven-out and Al-Shabab, the military wing of the ICU, regrouped and scored military victories against the Ethiopians forcing them to withdraw in January 2009. And on January 2014, Ethiopia which had literally crisscrossed across the border provinces on its own mandate, officially joined AMISOM with soldiers who were already in the country. Under the shade of the War on Terror, the prospect of recapturing what Ethiopia sees as a "rebellious state" and returning it to the federal union is within practical possibility. Having its boots inside the country, the aspiration had matured from top secret information to an attainable goal, and it is no longer dicey to pursue it politically and militarily. Ethiopia's former prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, announced the progress report stating that his forces occupy "...more than 60 percent of Somali territory", and the relatively stable regions are under his control by means of a political hand-twisting outlined as cooperation.

Second, legal legitimacy; to have deceitful agreements with Somali politicians to appear that the annexation process was done within the legal frame. The civil war has produced a new type of politician whose personal interests outweigh the appointed responsibilities. They are deeply engrossed in greed that is oblivious to all tasks and yet they speak of Somalia in willful passion. As a result, Somalia is the most corrupted nation on earth, and at times, the repercussions are irreparable. For example, in early 1990s, according to the Italian newspaper, *Famiglia Cristiana*, the deceased president, Ali Mahdi Mohammed, agreed with Swiss firm, Achair Partners and the Italian waste broker, Progresso, to dump tons of toxic waste in Somalia in exchange for a large sum of money. " Instead of \$1,000, you can dump toxic waste into Somali waters for only \$2.50 a ton!" The European Green Party presented the copies of contracts to the European Parliament signed by the two companies involved and Nur Elmy Osman (Somalia's health minister at the time) who signed the agreement on behalf of Ali Mahdi Mohamed.

Ethiopia has succeeded in achieving its objectives both militarily and politically, and it considers Somalia as a conquered nation which is a few momentous signatures away from annexation. Having signed off Somalia's major seaports to Ethiopia on 16 June 2018, the former president,

Farmajo, and the current administration are lobbying to merge Somalia with Ethiopia in a confederate system.

Normally, when land ownership is about to change to a culturally alien polity, there emerges a new creed with new moral conscience, and often, the new philosophies imperceptibly modify the local customs and refine their theological roots and their intellectual attitudes. The new reality gradually unveils itself appearing as the new norm unopposed. Though the confederate system is not official yet, the new scheme is already here. Ethiopia's intellectual convictions have mushroomed in semi-autonomous states to the point where Ethiopia's national day is colorfully celebrated in Hargeisa and Garowe, and with time, Somalia's cultural and religious moral values will be obscured. And if this trend continues, like Spain (Al-Andalus), Somalia will only be remembered in the history books.

LESSONS FROM SPAIN (AL-ANDALUS)

Recently, I came across Stanley Lane-Poole's book, 'The Moors in Spain', and the resemblances between Spain at the time and Somalia's current political state are strikingly incredible. Spain was in a golden era and in a true enlightenment, but over years, nepotism and malignant practices had overshadowed the success and continued to hurt the existence of the state. As the result, the Umayyad caliphate ended in 750 followed by independent petty kings. To make a long history short, Spain was in a total mess. The petty kings spent a great deal of effort to outdo each other but their individual efforts were not enough to resist the unified Spanish Christian forces' "...they wasted their strength with each other, and one would even intercept the other's army when it was on the march against the common enemy." In 1260, the petty kings were subdued and the bulk of the Muslim land was lost either by military conquest or through deceitful agreements except Granada. According to the author, the armies of Ferdinand and Isabella were at the gates of Granada at the end of 1491, and the ruler, Muhammad Abu 'Abd Allah, also known as Boabdil to the West, was out of choices. He needed Morocco's assistance but the fear of being dethroned by his rescuers held him hostage and the highly-anticipated help did not come from Turkey or Egypt. So, he surrendered in exchange for a safe passage.

The loss of Spain was due to the Arabian curse. The Arabs are reserved in character, courageous in nature, and they are superlatively generous by custom but the downside is that they possess a pendulum-like personality that swings between fury and friendliness and knows no

compromises. According to the author, during their military conquest, this temperament was simply restrained but it has never been entirely extinguished, and had they exclusively secluded themselves in Arabian Peninsula, their nation would have collapsed in no time doubting their intellectual capacity to solve their quarrels other than the sword. They share a language, a progressive culture and very much all of them subscribe to Islam as a religion, and though they outwardly appear a homogeneous people, these lifeless unifying factors are of no avail if the spirit of tribe is invoked. When they set aside the trivial disputes, they conquered Spain and beyond, and on the contrary, when they succumbed to the fanatical elements of tribalism, they collapsed like a house of cards. People who were known for their greatness and virtuosity are now noted for ignorance and incapacity. And for Somalis who suffer from tribal antagonism syndrome, this is an invaluable lesson.

CONCLUSION

Without exaggeration, Somalia is at the brink of being completely swallowed, and what worries many is the possibility of Ethiopian triumph. What was once a distant pipedream is now in the public domain for discussion to evaporate people's sense of patriotism and for psychological grooming to manipulate the masses in a way that is in line with their imperialistic agenda. Any form of resistance to this encroachment to Somalia's territorial sovereignty and its political independence is invariably labeled as terrorism. And like Israel, Ethiopia has discerningly exploited this fear factor to its advantage resulting in complete silence among the politicians, and as usual, the landlords are unduly occupied with their private affairs.

The solution to this impending threat lies in the path of our legendary heroes the likes of Ahmed Gurey, Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, and Sheikh Hassan Barsame. Not because of their warlike potentials but their noble attempts to preserve a religious philosophy threatened by Catholic Missionaries, to repossess a land whose natural resources were plundered by world powers, and to free people whose proficiencies were used for expansionism ventures. Though their respective uprisings were subdued by superior superpowers but their legacy outlasted them, and the concept of resistance against foreign invaders and self-sacrifice for a noble cause still lives on. And hopefully, a savior will emerge unexpectedly.



The statue of Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan

And as history pages concur, Somalia has a consistent record of defeating the Ethiopians: As an army general of Adal Sultanate,

Ahmed Gurey, conquered three-quarters of Abyssinian Empire during the Abyssinian-Adal War in 1529-1543. [2] In recent history, neither the British nor the Ethiopians were effective in repelling Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan's men, the Dervishes, individually during his reign from 1900-1921 forcing Menelik to propose a joint operation with British against them. The Ogaden war in 1977, Siad Barre overwhelmed the Ethiopian troops with his unrivaled revolutionary army and viciously obliterated them before retreating due to the Soviet Union's military intervention. Even the Islamic courts Union's (ICU) ill-equipped paramilitary gave them a bloody nose during its military intervention 2006-2009. So, the current Ethiopia's military incursions in Somalia are simply different episodes of the same war.

Finally, most of Somalis do not attribute no effort to the imminent threat that is looming on the horizon though they unwaveringly support in averting the enemy. Without resistance, the result would be that of Boabdil's, the ruler of Granada. Before the final departure, he was quoted saying, "Allah Akbar!" "Allah is Greatest," bursting into tears. His mother, Ayesha, stood beside him: "You may well weep like a woman," she said, "...for what you could not defend like a man." And his descendants lived in Morocco as beggars. And if there is any other way other than armed resistance, the Palestinians would have gotten their land back.

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[1] Paul B. Henze (2002). *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*. Hurst & Company. p. 90.

[2] Saheed A. Adejumobi, *The History of Ethiopia*, (Greenwood Press: 2006), p.178

