

BOOK REVIEW**An Introduction to Ethiopia's Foreign Policy: Its Process and Reflections Pre-1991
by Taye Berhanu (PhD)**

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This is an introductory book which is structured in to nine main topics with the general objective of depicting the background, process, instruments and tenets of foreign policy of the pre-1991 Ethiopia (p.ii). The author attempted to discuss 'ancient' and 'modern' external relations of Ethiopia, foreign policy making and the ideologization and de-ideologization of the foreign policy.

Methodologically, the author adopted historical-descriptive approach. As the result, he gave due emphasis to 'history of the country' to explicate the basic foreign policy principles from 'ancient' times to the demise of the *Derg* regime (p.5). Accordingly, he gathered data from books, official documents, journal articles and news papers. The historical-descriptive approach goes in line with the stated objectives. But, had attempts been made to compare the foreign policy of the country either thematically or chronologically, the changes and continuities could have been clearly understood. As regards to the methods of data collection, interview with resourceful individuals should have been used concerning the Imperial and the *Derg* regimes.

In terms of the scope, the author stated that the book is a bird's eye view or concise reflection on foreign policy and relations of Ethiopia (pp.ii-iii, 5). Driven by absence of written materials about the 'long dating' foreign relations of the country, the book encourages further studies; yet it can serve as a quick reference (p.5). Though clearly stated, its scope is vast. This in turn has had its own ramifications on the achievement of the stated objectives and on the significance of the book.

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² This article can be cited this way.

The core argument was that safeguarding independence and promoting cordial relations were the outmost preoccupations of Ethiopia's foreign policy and relations (p.4). Consequently, the author attempted to 'duly consider the historical facts' concluding that cooperation, respect for sovereignty, peaceful co-existence and non-alignment were the defining principles of the country's foreign relations (p.102).

Overall, the book revolves around three major themes. First, throughout the book, it is stressed that the external factors have significant influence on foreign policy of the country. For example, foreign policy of Ethiopia towards the Middle Eastern countries was significantly shaped by external factors like the great power rivalry than the domestic factors (p.12). It should be noted in this regard that slavery was abolished after it had been considered a precondition for Ethiopia to join the League of Nations (Leenco, 1999, pp.156-57). Furthermore, Ethiopia's way into the socialist camp after the 1974 revolution had been preceded by external factors. The most immediate one was the United State's decline to provide armaments to Ethiopia on the eve of the Somali aggression (p.15, 81). Thus, adoption of socialist principles like proletariat internationalism as foreign policy ethos was largely precipitated by the external dynamics (p.81; Clapham, 2003). Later on, de-ideologization of foreign policy, i.e. reduced influence of ideology on foreign policy, came as a result of intertwined changes in the external setting (p.15). Generally, the foreign policy of the country was reactivated and primarily dictated by the external setting (p.103; Negussay, 1977, p.53).

Second, the book emphasizes the country's commitment to the principle of collective security. This principle implies an 'inward' looking grouping of at least two states committing to take collective measures against potential or actual threat to peace (Palmer, 1999). So, Ethiopia became a member of the League of Nations primarily as a guarantee for its sovereignty and territorial integrity (p.55). The country's active participation in global collective security arrangements, though the League failed to deliver its role in advent of Italian aggression, and the United Nations, as manifested by the peacekeeping operations in Korea and Congo, are showcases of this commitment (p.58-60; Negussay, 1977, pp.57-58).

The third concern is personalized foreign policy formulation until the downfall of the *ancient regime*. This implies that foreign policy was being formulated by the leaders in association with their advisors and was not being clearly expressed in the written form (p.82; Negussay, 1977, p.52). For example, during the reign of Emperor Haile Sellassie foreign policy was purely a personal domain; he used to enjoy constitutionally granted sovereign power thereon. This was evidenced by his personal appointment of diplomats and the negligible role of the foreign policy making and executing institutions (Arka, 2002, p.100).

Overall, three issues call for critical reflection: organization and scope of the book, and the author's orientation to the history of Ethiopian state and the technicalities. First of all, the book has been structured obscurely. The title of the book implies that the book is concerned with foreign policy making and its implementation process in the years before 1991. But, the book is not structured in the way that it addresses well this. The stated objective could have been better achieved had the book been either chronologically or thematically structured. The author should have chronologically structured the book into the pre-modern period, the formative years (the reign of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV), Menelik II's era, the reign of Emperor Haile Sellassie, and the *Derg* regime.

Alternatively, themes such as the role of leaders in foreign policy, the major foreign policy goals, and the nature of domestic and external setting should have been dealt with. This

could have helped the author better had achieved the objectives and would have allowed the readers better had comprehend foreign policy making and implementation process through the years and most importantly the changes and continuities thereof.

In addition, the time frame of the book is arguably vast. The stated attempt was to duly consider relevant historical developments (p.ii) to give a bird's eye view of the nature of Ethiopia's foreign policy (p.5) in the historical perspective (*Ibid*). But, the author's intent is far-fetched and he failed to succinctly apprehend major historical developments and to enlist important foreign policy themes. For instance, of the very significant legacy on foreign policies and relations of the 'modern' Ethiopia, the major foreign policy themes of Tewodros II, Yohannes IV and Menelik II were left largely untouched. This would have helped the author better had he substantiated the stated core argument (p.4). All in all, it seems that the author's intent to cover vast period of time which is accompanied by failure to devise fitting thematic-chronological structure has made the focus very shallow and has heavily jeopardized the should/would be contributions of the book.

As far as history is concerned, the author's conception can be scrutinized on two major grounds. The first is related to the rise of Ethiopian state. The author adopted '*Ethiopianist view*'³ echoing 'Ethiopia' is one of the oldest states in the world with cherished history of independence (p.4, 18). Thus, the quasi-dogmatic mainstream conception of Ethiopian history was taken for granted. It is evident that Ethiopia was the home of numerous self-governing territorial units. But, in similar mantra to the many of mainstream historians, 'pre-modern Ethiopia' or 'ancient Ethiopia' represented only the kingdom of Aksum, Zagwe and the Christian highland kingdom. Consequently, the author repeatedly presented 'Ethiopia' as a Christian State (p.9, 21, 23, 24, 27).

Though the country has been the home of numerous self-administering units, the making of Ethiopian state was begun in the mid nineteenth century. This implies that Ethiopia joined the club of sovereign states only after Adowa as manifested by the signing of treaty of Addis Ababa and the subsequent establishment of foreign diplomatic missions and the delimitation of the country's boundary lines (Bahru, 2001, pp.111-114; Both, 2004, pp.67-68). Thus, this analysis of foreign relations of the country should take into account the history of State formation. It is possible to examine foreign relations of the self-governing units in their own right. Thus, if our intention is to holistically understand 'ancient' external relations of Ethiopia, attention should be given to politico-territorial units in 'the south' such as the kingdom of Jimma, the Sultanate of Ifat and Adal, the Sheikhdoms of Assosa and Awsa (Afar), and the kingdom of Kaffa.

The issue of Eritrea and Somalia presents another problematic historical conception by the author. Accordingly, it was argued that claims by the successive Ethiopian governments over the two 'lost' territories were justified. Regarding Eritrea, it needs to be noted that the territory was granted to the Italians and it was left as their colony by Menelik II (Philipps and Carillet, 2006, p.296). But, his failure to free Eritrea from the Italians and his signing of the treaty that

³ There are three perspectives on the rise of Ethiopian state: the '*Ethiopianists*', '*Ethno-Nationalists*' and the '*Post Modernists*'. *Ethiopianists* contend that Ethiopia have unbroken history of state formation dating back to at least 1000 B.C. For detailed exposition on the perspectives, see, among others, Merara, 2003; Teshale, 1995; Sorenson, 1993.

recognized Eritrea as a rightful domain of Italy in an exchange of recognition of his sovereignty domestically was not mentioned. On the other side, "...the Somalis were always outside traditional Ethiopia...and their case became an internal issue only because a part of them found themselves physically situated within the boundaries of the present-day Ethiopian entity" (Leenco, 1999, p.164). So, the author should have first apprehended the idea of 'lost' territories than have echoed it.

Lastly, there are some technical irregularities related to documentation. Though the reference is existent, it is not well arranged; information like year of publication were missing in some cases and few cited and footnoted materials were not listed. There are also technical errors related to footnotes, indentation and quotations. For example, a double quoted six line sentence was not indented, as was done to some even shorter sentences, and the source was not cited (p.65). Similarly, a two paragraph sentence was directly quoted but not indented (p.87-88). In addition, a number of paragraphs is directly quoted without italicizing, numbering and indenting (p.89-90). There is also a footnoted sentence without leading head number (p.89).

All in all, the book is clear in the language it used. In spite of the points raised above, the flow of ideas from the introduction to the conclusion is consistent being guided by the core argument and the objectives stated. The author seems to have achieved all the stated objectives on his own right. As he mentioned, this work may provoke scholars and practitioners of the Ethiopian history and politics to think-about well-structured and comprehensive account of foreign relations of the country. This is not to downgrade the monograph's contribution. Rather, the book, despite all its loopholes and sidings, provides at least established account of foreign policy of Ethiopia until 1991.

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