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Abstract

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**Challenges and Successes**

Foreign policies can be affected internally by the economic status, military status and leadership behavior of the state, or externally by the existence of superpowers. The foreign policy of Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II was affected both internally and externally. Before the coronation of the Emperor, Ethiopia was an isolated country with half a century old civil war. Externally, there was a rising interest in Africa by western imperialism and continual expansion of the Turko-Egyptian around the red sea. Despite all the challenges, Emperor Tewodros II was able to achieve certain amount of success in his diplomatic relations and was able to create Ethiopia’s first modern foreign policy that transcended the Horn region.

In this section we will discuss each challenge that were against the implementation of the foreign policies, their respective impacts and the attempts to overcome the consequences. In addition, we will also explore the successes that were achieved regardless of the obstacles.

**Challenges.**

**Internal challenges**

Internal challenges on the foreign policy of Emperor Tewodros II can be generalized as lack of resource, experience and support.

***Lack of support***.

During 1855, Ethiopia was a country divided among princes where each claimed to be the king of the country. Thus, even after Emperor Tewodros II came to power, the princes kept contacting the international community in secret, going against the emperor’s foreign policy. Unfortunately, one of the few sources of unity, the Ethiopian Orthodox church was also not an advocate of the king’s or any other international religious relations because of the previous attempts of the Portuguese to convert the religion of the country in the sixteenth century. Regardless of the emperor’s trial to either convince or force all parties, his actions that followed from his foreign policies were short in support.

For instance: - “during the British expedition to Ethiopia, Emperor Tewodros II could not trust even the four thousand soldiers who still followed him. Given the opportunity, they might abandon him as so many had already done.” (Wikipedia contributors, 2021)

***Lack of economic and military resource***.

As a result of the prolonged isolation of Ethiopia from technological and scientific advancements of the medieval eras, the country had less significant economy and military power. Even though Emperor Tewodros II opened the country to the international relations and tried to import military goods as well as knowledge, the external replies were ambiguous and futile. This lack of such resource led the rest of the world to undermine the foreign policies of the emperor.

***Lack of experience***.

As the diplomatic relations of Emperor Tewodros II was limited to the circle of neighboring princes, one of the most mentioned challenges was the lack of experience in foreign policy. Special example is the way he handled his relations to Europe with bold rush to war leading to the British invasion and the end of his era.

**External challenges**

External challenges on the foreign policy of Emperor Tewodros II can be classified as Turko-Egyptian expansion and Anglo-French imperialism.

***Turko-Egyptian expansion***

In the 17th century the Ottomans ruled almost the entire north coast of Africa and west to Egypt and the Holy Lands (modern-day Israel and Palestine). Their navy ruled the waters of the Mediterranean while their traders rivalled those of Spain, Portugal and the Italian city-states. Egypt on the other hand was on the march to control the Nile River from its source. Therefore, both empires imposed clear threats against the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Emperor Tewodros II wanted to go to London and Paris to improve the foreign relation but due to the weak Naval Army he couldn’t cross the Red Sea. The blockage of the red sea also prevented the transport of military equipment. In order to overcome the problems, the emperor asked for assistance from Britain and Russia other Cristian countries, he even tried to diplomatically solve the issues with the Ottoman Turks but the end results of both attempts were futile.

***Anglo-French imperialism***

The drawback of the emperor’s foreign policy was his false hope in Britain and France. He thought the alliance between those nations was due to the Crusade of Christianity vs Islam and Britain and France were Chrisitan Powers, when in reality both were interested in politically, strategically and commercially cooperating with the Ottoman Empire.

Keeping his suspicion of the Anglo-French imperialism, the emperor did not stop trying to form relations with the Christian superpowers of the world both to get technical aid like firearms and ammunition and technological knowledge. Most responses were missionaries and adventurers. Looking at this the emperor stopped accepting any missionaries unless they are skilled.

In the end though the continuous undermining and neglection led the emperor to suspicion alliance between the Anglo-French imperialism and the Ottoman Turk empire. The final challenge was when British attacked and at Magdala he fought against the Britain army and lost, and killed himself rather than surrender in disgrace.

**Successes**

Despite the difficult challenges and failures, Emperor Tewodros II was able to use his foreign policy to achieve historical successes in Ethiopia. Some of the major successes are as follows: the foreign policies were able to:

* + keep territorial integrity of the country
  + opened the country to international relations after long years of isolation and abnegation
  + import some knowledge to the country from the western world
  + start the Gaffat factory with aid from Britain, France and employed 2000 Ethiopians to manufacture firearms.
  + domestically produce 28 guns and 9 mortars which was a great achievement considering the lack of previous connections and knowledge.
  + imposed a big psychological influence of equality and the spirit of modernization to his successors and the rest of the world.

References

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