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Book Review: SOMALIA - Past & Present

Book Review: Author: Mohamed Osman Omar

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Accomplished author and Somalia's Ambassador to India, Mohamed Osman Omar has done it again. He has published another informative book about his beloved Somalia. This time the title is "SOMALIA Past and Present."

When His Excellency asked me to review his book I must admit that I had a feeling of, 'Here we go; a bunch of belly-aching about how the international community and the UN have betrayed the people of Somalia, without the turning of eyes inward (towards the perpetrators of Somalia's afflictions within the country). As I delved into the book, my skepticism (or you might say pessimism) was soon alleviated.

This is a well researched chronicle of how this relatively small African country, at the pointy end of the Horn of Africa, was trampled upon, sliced up, parceled out and abused before achieving independence. It goes on to describe the suffering of the Somali people through an abusive dictatorship, which was ousted by internal factions with a common mission (to oust the dictator), but no common vision as to the future of this war stricken country. This led to internal brinkmanship of warlords, disastrous international intervention (Did anyone not see Black Hawk Down) and the state of Somalia today.

Specifically: The new book covers the history of Somalia from the 19th to the 21st century including the establishment of the new government and the Aden Declaration, which brought together the rival groups of the state institutions and the first meeting of the Federal Parliament in the country after 14 months of disagreement as to the location of the seat of the government and parliament.

It covers the history of the past and the present Somalia very well, dealing in detail with the early occupation of foreign powers of Somali territories and the struggle of the Somali Hero, Mohamed Abdulle Hassan against colonial rule and the reason for his tragic end. The UN Trusteeship period starting from 1950 until independence of the former British and Italian Somalilands in 1960 is also covered. The history of the occupation of former French Somali Coast from 1862 until it gained its independence on 27 June 1977 is vividly recorded. The unilateral declaration of independence of the breakaway region of Somalia, former British Protectorate is also taken up in the book.

The birth, the rise and the fall of the famous "Bloodless Revolution" or "Kacaankii Barakaysnaa" and the end of the father of the 21 October 1969 Revolution, General Mohamed Siad Barre and the failure of the factions who forced the "Revolutionary Government" out of power and the hardship they caused to the people and the country is widely discussed in the book. The book also details the other missing Somali territories and Islands – the bone of contention between Somalia and its neighbours, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya.

The question of deployment of foreign forces in Somalia, particularly the objection of a large section of the Somali society to the inclusion of peacekeepers from frontline states which caused disagreement within the government institutions has been widely covered in the book.

Finally, at the end of the book, and before its bidding, the dramatic events occurred in Somalia in early June of 2006. Unexpected as it was, the news of the victory of the Union of Islamic Courts over the despotic warlords, who held hostage the capital city of Mogadishu and some parts of the country, for over fifteen years, killing and maiming, looting and raping, caught the world on the wrong foot. As it was a very important and highly significant event, the author stopped the binding of the book and included a chapter as Postscript at the end of the book.

This is an ideal book for those who are interested in Somali history and particularly for the young generation in the country and abroad who are interested in learning the past and presents events of their motherland. It gives a glimpse of Somali history to whoever is interested in knowing about this turbulent corner of the continent of Africa and its people which so harshly suffered in the hands of both foreign and internal forces.

I sincerely believe that this book will be beneficial to those who will have time to read it. The author (Mohamed Osman Omar) tells me that a Somali version of the same book will be published very soon. Earlier books of Mohamed Osman Omar include: *The Road to Zero – Somalia's Self Destruction*; *SOMALIA: A Nation Driven to Despair*; *The Scramble in the Horn of Africa*; and, *SOMALIA Between Devils and Deep Sea*. For further information about Somalia Past and Present, or any other of his books, please contact the author at: mosman65@yahoo.com or mosman61@hotmail.com

About the author

Mohamed Osman Omar was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1937. He studied in Mogadishu as well as abroad. He began his career at a very young age during the UN Trusteeship as a Civil Servant at the General Post Office, reaching the post of Chief Controller of the main Cash Department. He was among the first Somalis who took up posts held by the Italians during the period of what was called "the Somalisation". After the Post Office, he worked at the Constituent Assembly during the preparation for the country's independence. In 1962, he worked as a journalist in the Ministry of Information. In 1967, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as a Diplomat at the Somali Embassies in London, Beijing, Tehran, Dar-Es-Salam, Khartoum, Belgrade (former Yugoslavia) and New Delhi. The last three posts as his country's Ambassador. He still is Somalia's Ambassador to India and concurrently to Srilanka and Singapore.

For six years, Ambassador Mohamed Osman Omar was Chief of Protocol in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He speaks several languages, including Italian and Mandarin Chinese.

Preface

The history of Somali people goes back to thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians spoke of Somalia as land of God (Land of Punt). The Chinese merchants frequented its coast and carried on lucrative trade long before the arrival of the European powers in their quest for empires.

The Somali were (and still are) mostly nomadic people and did not live within clearly defined boundaries. However, it should be noted that the modern state emerged only after the decline of the Roman Empire. And that too took many years to materialise. Somali nomadic tribes moved over the land in search of green pastures. Nonetheless Somali people had a clear identity of their own. There were magnificent cities built by them. Ibn Battuta, the well known Arab traveler and historian, visited Mogadishu in 1330 (1328). He arrived at Zaila and then headed for Mogadishu. He has described the city as a town of enormous size. Certainly, Mogadishu existed as a magnificent city long before Ibn Battuta noted its existence. For want of a written script for Somali language much of its history has passed into oblivion. What we do have is recorded by others which do not give the Somali perspective of their history. Somalia's ancient history lives in oral traditions and folklore.

The records documenting history remain fragmentary. As a result the present work suffers from the limitations imposed by these conditions. It concentrates its effort to present the Somali perspective on the struggle of the Somali people to regain control over their own destiny.

The first important encounter between the Somalis and the Europeans began when Vasco da Gama on his way back from India in 1499 assailed Mogadishu. But he failed to capture the city. Even Da Cunha in 1507 did not succeed in occupying the town. Twenty-five years later, 1532, Dom Estavam da Gama, Vasco da Gama's son, visited Mogadishu to buy a ship. On 5 December 1700 a British squadron men-of-war stopped near Mogadishu in what could be considered with the intent to threaten, but they did not land and a few days moved on probably to India.

In the first half of the Nineteenth century, Sultan Bargash bin Sa'id of Zanzibar occupied Mogadishu and ruled the town by means of a *Wali*. The conflict between those who wanted to establish their dominance over Somalia is illustrated by the incident of occupation of Mogadishu and other towns on the Somali coast by Sef b. Sultan, Imam of Oman, who had to fight a war against the Portuguese. After a little while the Imam ordered his troops to return back to Oman.

Although there is no record to indicate that Germans ever were in occupation of the Somali territories, in 1855 the German officials claimed that German East African Company had signed a Treaty with the Mijerteyn Chief under which the Somali territory from the east of the town of Berbera to Cape (Ras) Asurad had been ceded to the German company.

They also claimed to have entered into a Treaty with the Ruler of Obbia, whereby the Company acquired sovereign rights over the entire territory between Obbia and the town of Warsheikh.

In 1889, the Sultan of Zanzibar leased the town of Mogadishu to the Italian Government, which in 1906 bought all the settlements of Zanzibar on the Somali coast. The Italians stayed in the of Somalia they were defeated in the Second World War and Britain, which was the victor, took over the administration.

In the north of Somalia the British maneuver started from 1825 with a visit to Berbera. Following the Scramble of Africa in 1884, Britain signed friendship treaties and later on Protectorate treaties with the Somalis. It stayed in the country until 1960.

France also occupied part of Somali territories from 1862 until the territory of Djibouti obtained its independence in 1977 and became the Republic of Djibouti.

I have written in detail about this phase of the history of Somalia in my earlier work “The Scramble in the Horn of Africa” (Mogadishu 2001). A briefer version is included in the present work.

Somalia is the only country in Africa that many European colonial powers have conquered and divided in as many as five pieces, and if one includes Socotra, which is distinctly a Somali Island presently with Yemen, six. Somali territories were gifted to other countries by the colonial powers, before the scramble of Africa and after. This continued even after Somalia obtained its independence in 1960.

Two parts of Somalia, former British Somaliland and former Italian Somaliland won their independence respectively on 26 June 1960 and 1 July 1960 and formed the Republic of Somalia. Nine years later, the army took over in a “Bloodless Revolution”. It remained in power for two decades before being deposed by opposition groups in a bloody civil war.

The counter coup which ousted the military regime was spearheaded by the opposition groups—the USC and others in the south and SNM in the north. The groups in the south failed to organize an orderly take over of power, instead its militias went in rampage, looting private and public properties, and indiscriminately killing innocent citizens. Millions were forced to flee to neighbouring countries in search of safety.

Although there were some conflicts, in the North the SNM managed to bring relative peace through dialogue. In 1993, it declared a unilateral secession from the rest of the Somali Republic and established “the Republic of Somaliland” which so far no country has officially recognized. The leadership there has been praised for bringing the relative calm that the people are enjoying today. While in the South, the never-ending quarrel between the groups who claim power and the lack of solution is generating more fear in the minds of the people. This may lead to a new conflict that might cause more bloodshed.

Somalia has been a victim of bloody conflicts. It is the misfortune of the nation that people are not united in the pursuit of national interest. And some blindly support, due to tribal loyalties, selfish leaders who indulge in divisive politics in their self interest to the detriment of national interest. The nation is suffering for the lack of viable system of administration. This is the only country on earth that for over a decade has no central government to look after national interest.

To be a leader is to be able to deliver good things to the nation and not to abuse the nation’s rights.

As early as the end of the 17th century, the founder of Touba movement, Nasir al-Din, in Senegal, proclaimed,

“ God does not permit kings to pillage, kill or enslave their peoples. He appointed them, on the contrary, to preserve their subjects and protect them from enemies. Peoples were not made for kings, but kings for people.”

The subject of this book is not new to the students of history of Somalia, but I hope that it would be of use to many others who are interested in understanding the history of the country from the beginning of the colonial intervention to the present crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Somalia is in the news again but as in the past for the wrong reasons. The world has been forewarned the country is threaded with the prospect of a devastating famine and unless it soon comes to its assistance the famine may claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of unfortunate Somalis. The country has been devastated by internecine factional wars for more than a decade and a half. One wonders how this country so well endowed by nature with rich resources came to its present state of utter poverty and degradation. Why its problems do not appear to be ending.

I thank God that I was born as a Somali. I am proud to be a Somali. I cannot even think of belonging to any other country than my beloved Somalia. Home is always “sweet home”. As it is said “East or West Home is Always the Best.” .
“So, Verily, With every difficulty, there is relief,
Verily, with every difficulty there is relief”

Against all odds, I proudly represented Somalia in different capacities in many parts of the world. As its humble servant, I had proudly held its flag high. This could have not been possible without the encouragement and support of good friends around the world. I would heartily like to express my gratitude to all of them.

The young generation of Somalis must know the long history of their country’s trials and tribulations. It is only through an understanding of that history that they would acquire the capacity to frustrate and defeat the enemies of their beloved motherland and take her to the glorious height of peace and prosperity as a proud and respected member of the international community. Somalia does not covet an inch of territory of any other country but only wants all its children in various parts of its territories under foreign domination to be free and to be united under a single flag. It is with this specific purpose I have written this book.

Many friends have helped me in the preparation of this. It is not possible here to thank all of them individually. I sincerely thank all of them. My special thanks are due to my family members: my wife Mana Moallim Ibrahim, and my children Jeylani, Ali, Abdullahi, Osman, Ibrahim, Amina and Halima and their spouses as well as other relatives for their understanding and support without which it would have been hard even to retain my mental peace much less to write this book. My greetings to my grand-children who are a source of joy and happiness and I pray for them a joyous and prosperous future.

SOMALIA - Past & Present Chapter 1 : British Somaliland

The early penetration of foreign powers into the Somali territories began in 1517 when Sultan Salim I annexed Egypt to the Ottoman Empire. Forty years later, the Portuguese were driven out of the Red Sea. The Turks occupied Zeyla, but not Berbera, and placed a garrison there. This was withdrawn in 1663 and Zeyla came under the rule of Imam of Sanaa in Yemen. Throughout this period Berbera remained independent.

Berbera seems to have attracted the attention of the British for the first time in 1825. It was the time when Britain’s East India Company was expending its possessions in India. In April of that year the ship Mary Anne, under the command of Captain Linguard touched Berbera for, what they called, trading purpose; apparently thinking that the inhabitants of the town would not even notice their presence. But he was attacked by the inhabitants while on shore. One of his passengers and one of his native crew were killed, and his second officer was wounded. With the help of some of the natives, Captain Linguard and his party succeeded in getting on board of another boat, Duria Dowlat, which took them to Aden.

The British sent an expedition consisting of two King’s ships Tamar and Pandora and the East India Company’s vessel Amherst to Berbera to avenge the action of the inhabitants. Arriving at Berbera, the British attacked the inhabitants and apparently forced the Sheikhs of the Habr Awal tribe to sign a treaty on 6 February 1827, by which the Shaikhs agreed to compensate both Linguard for his losses and for the bereaved families for the loss of their men.

According to the treaty, the Sheikhs “bound themselves to remain at peace with the British Government and to allow British vessels to trade unrestrictedly at ‘any port under the authority of the Sheikhs of Habr Awal tribe,’ similar privileges being accorded to them in respect to British harbours.” This was a meaningless gesture intended to convey symbolic equality for the Sheikhs who were in no position to carry on their goods to the British ports.

The British were systematically extending their overseas empire. When they occupied Aden on 19 January 1839 their interest in Somaliland increased. A year later, the British Political Agent at Aden, Captain Moresby was sent to meet the Shareef of Mocha and obtain his permission to conclude a treaty with the Governor of Zaila. As a result of his visit, not one but two treaties were concluded; one with the Shareef of Mocha on 1 September 1840 and other with the Governor of Zaila two days later.

Tajoura and Zaila became of great interest to the British largely because in 1840 British Government purchased the islands commanding the approaches to these two harbours. These islands known for the slave trade were never occupied. They were principal outlet of trade for southern Abyssinia.

In 1840, rumours about an expedition from Bourdeaux (France) heading for the port of Zaila reached the British Government. It asked its Political Agent at Aden to establish and ensure the British influence among the inhabitants of the African coastline near Aden as the settlement of any other power on that coast would have been “highly detrimental to the British interest”. The Government especially directed the Political Agent to purchase a station that would command the harbour of Tajoura. Captain Moresby and Lieutenant Barker were entrusted by the Political Agent with the task of ensuring that the Sultan of Tajoura signed a treaty ceding the Mussa Islands to the British. The two officers succeeded and the desired treaty was signed on 19 August 1840. The British formally took possession of the islands on 31 August 1840. The treaty had two important clauses, according to which Sultan Mahomed bin Mahomed agreed not to enter into any treaty or bond with any other European nation without first consulting the British authorities at Aden. He also agreed not to acquiesce in any bond or treaty detrimental or injurious to the British interests.

In 1847, the Imam of Muscat sent an emissary to Berbera to claim the port of Berbera his by right, but the Somalis refused to acknowledge this. Lieutenant Cruttenden, who visited that coast in April, reported that the Mijertain Somalis paid tribute to the Imam.

Towards the end of 1851, the British Political Agent at Aden reported disturbances between two tribes, which led to the closure of Berbera trade. The problem was that the British discovered that Sheikh Ali Shermarke, the Governor of Zaila, had written a letter to the Turkish authorities at Hudeida proposing to place Berbera under the Turkish flag.

Towards the end of March 1852 a boat from Aden flying the British flag was attacked off Berbera. The British blamed the squadron of Sheikh Ali Shermarke for the attack. He was asked to compensate the owner of the boat and further pay a fine of Rupees 500 for the “insult to the British flag”. Shermarke asked for the fine to be excused. The Assistant Political Agent at Aden Lieutenant Cruttenden feared that the Pasha of Yemen would resent the fine as Shermarke was a Turkish subject. While the Political Agent Captain Haines observed that Shermarke was not a Turkish subject but a Somali by birth and that the “outrage was purely of his doing and without the knowledge of any other authority.”

In 1854 a mission, named Somali Expedition, under the command of Lieutenant Richard Burton, was dispatched to explore the country between Berbera and Zanzibar. In a report dated 22 February 1855, Lieutenant Burton described Sheikh Shermarke as a Chief who had “rented” Zaila and its dependency Tajoura from the Turks. Burton added that, “the height of Shermarke’s ambition was to fly the British flag at Tajoura and Zaila. He described the Sheikh as a good ruler, who maintained tranquility at Zaila.

Richard Burton who stayed in Zaila, from 31 October to 27 November 1854, wrote in his book, “First Footsteps in East Africa”, published in 1856: “The Governor of Zaila, El Haji Shermarke bin Ali Salih, is rather a remarkable man. He is sixteenth, according to his own account, in descent from Ishak El Hazrami, the saintly founder of the great Gar Hajis and Awal tribes”. He went on to recommend the establishment of a British Agency at Berbera, a measure strongly supported by Brigadier-General Coghlan, British Resident at Aden, who also wanted it to “Secure our daily provision which is now at the mercy of any Arab fanatic whose hatred of us or our friends may impel him to acts of aggression”. (Emphasis added)

On 19 April 1855, Burton’s Mission was attacked and Lieutenant Croyan of his party was killed. For this “offence”, the British blockaded the port of Berbera thinking that this would force the Chiefs to surrender the alleged murderers of Croyan. The Chiefs did not surrender the “murderers”. Eventually the blockade was lifted on 9 November 1856 after a treaty was signed between the British and the Chiefs. This treaty, as the earlier one, secured the commercial interests of the contracting parties; it further bound the Somalis to abolish the slave traffic.

Berbera was of the greatest value to the British as the garrison at Aden obtained its supplies of fresh provisions from there. The British authorities were apprehensive that their supplies could be stopped at any time. The Political Resident noted that disorder existed among the tribes in the territory. It was a place where, “every man has his share; the assembly is a democracy without laws and regulations of any kind.”

As far as commerce was concerned, the Somalis exported mainly ghee, (clarified butter), to Aden. According to The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, the Somalis had learned the art of clarifying butter, and exported it in the 19th century by the same class of ships that had brought it to them from India in the First century. The ghee will keep in the tropics not only for years but for centuries. The account given by Burton (First Footsteps in East Africa, pp. 136 and 247) shows that modern caravans took it for trips of six weeks or more under the same hot climate of Somaliland. Lieut. Cruttenden in his description of the Berbera Fair wrote of modern ships laden with ghee in jars, bought in Somaliland for trade elsewhere; probably along the Arabian coast.

Towards the end of the Second World War, the Somalis in the north established the Somaliland National Society (SNS) which became active. It was composed of a diverse group of town-based Somalis from the independent business sector, and people generally better educated and with a wider range of experiences. It absorbed some smaller parties that had started in the early 1930s before the war but which had not had much impact. Civil servants were prohibited by the Protectorate government from joining political parties, though many were clandestinely involved or sympathetic. In 1946 they merged with the Somali Transport Company (STC), a self-help organization led by Mohamed Jama Urdoh. In 1951 it reorganised itself and assumed a new name, the Somali National League (SNL) and it set its own political programmes as follows: (i) independence and unification of the Somali people under one political unit, (ii) social, political, and economic development, and (iii) the cessation of tribal feuding.

The National United Front (NUF) was not originally a political party, but was an organisation created in 1955 by the Somalis in British Somaliland to put pressure on the British to reverse the decision on the handing over of the administration of the Haud and Reserved Area to Ethiopia. The NUF provided a political framework for all parties including SYL and SNL and other organisations like the Somali Officers’ Union that represented the civil service, to have their say.

The NUF sent a delegation that represented all such groups in the Protectorate to Britain, and subsequently to the United Nations to protest the ceding of land to Ethiopia. The delegation was led by Michael Mariano. Later the NUF evolved into a political party in its own right. The NUF was led by Michael Mariano and the other main political party, Somali National League, was led by Mohamed Ibrahim Egal.

SOMALIA Past & Present Chapter 2 : Turkish Involvement

Although the British had gained a firm foothold on the Somali territory, they warily watched the maneuvers of other powers who were also flexing their muscles in the age of imperialism. On 25 February 1870, Major General Sir E.L. Russell, the British Political Resident at Aden, wrote to C. Gonne, Secretary to British Colonial Government in Bombay, India, that he had received a verbal report from Subedar (Non-commissioned officer) Mahomed Mahmood that the Somalis had been somewhat taken by the display made by the Egyptian (Turkish) Bey, who paraded his men with band playing and they thought the Turkey must be a great nation.

Russell wrote that if some British vessels-of-war did not soon visit the ports of Bulhar and Berbera and demonstrate the British power to them, they will fall into the hands of Egypt and Turkey. The problem was that the ship Sind had no troops on board and evidently was not a warship. It was looked on as a trading vessel. On the other hand, the Ottoman vessel Khartoum with the Bey would remain at Bulhar or Berbera until the season closed, in about five or six weeks. During this time, Russell cautioned that “unless we can hinder it, it is probable the Somalies may submit to the Ottoman or Egyptian rule. This will be ruinous to Aden, as all our livestock and a large portion of our trade come from these ports; and if we may judge from the territory on the Red Sea under Turkish rule, it will be disastrous to the country.” He went on to recommend that a British warship be sent as soon as possible to Bulhar and Berbera. He said: “The Somalees know the straightforwardness of our Government, but they are barbarians, and are attracted by present display; and I fear, unless I can give ocular evidence of our power, as would be by a vessel-of-war visiting the country, I shall not be able to undermine the action of the Turkish Bey.” Russell’s letter reveals how the British regarded themselves as superior moral beings and the Somalis as barbarians who only understood the language of force.

Subedar Mahommed reminded the Somalis that they had signed an agreement with the British Government not to sell either Berbera or Bulhar to any foreign power. The Subedar drew the attention of Russell to the fact that the agreement was made when the British withdrew the blockade of these ports some 40 years back, and the British ensign was planted at each place, and the agreement was sent to Calcutta and approved. Russell did not know that they had an agreement with the Somalis. He said, "I will search the Office records, and see if any trace of it is to be found. I require the Sind to take the Native Infantry Relief to Perim, and when this is completed, about the 2nd of March, I shall send the Sind again to Boolhar, and shall endeavour, by advice and presents, to gain the Somalees to object the disposal of their territory."

Russell's apprehension did not abate. He again wrote on 4 March 1870 to the Secretary to Government of Bombay, saying that he heard from Berbera through a local person that the Bey of the Egyptian Government had re-embarked the guns, soldiers, and tents, and landed them at Berbera and that it was his intention to hold on to the sea coast territory of Berbera and Bulhar for his government.

The General informed: "The (Ship) Sind has just returned from taking the relief to Perim, and will be sent again to Berbera on Monday to watch affairs, and to prevent, if possible, the tribes from committing their country to Moslem rule." This was the first time that the British official explicitly mentioned religion in his dispatches to his superiors. Whether this was the British policy, or not, at this time, the Political Resident explicitly stated that he sent his men to Berbera "to watch affairs and to prevent, if possible, the tribes from committing their country to Moslem rule." (Emphasis added)

Unknown to the Somalis the British and Turkish governments were competing with each other for the control over their territories. In 1870, there were rumours that the Turkish authorities in Egypt had appointed Momtaz Pasha as Governor of all the African Coast from Suez to Cape Guardafui, including Bulhar and Berbera.

After nearly a month General Russell heard the rumours again. This time he decided to write to the Turkish Pasha, Commander of the Khartoum (ship), on 5 April 1870, and told him that the Somalis were under treaty engagements with the British. The Pasha rejected the contention and claimed that these countries and all the surrounding countries were under the Sultan's Government, and therefore there was no necessity to take them, as they were already under the Turkish flag and that his present object was to settle disputes.

The British did not give up. Disputing Pasha's contention, Russell again wrote to him two weeks later on 19 April saying that the British was unaware that Berbera and Bulhar were claimed by the Turkish Government. The British had been at Aden for more than 30 years and they would have certainly heard of the Turkish claims before. He argued that in 1855-56 they had blockaded the ports of Berbera and Bulhar, and that the then Turkish Government had offered no remonstrance. Furthermore, the Chiefs and elders would not have subsequently entered into an independent treaty with the British had the two ports been under the Turkish rule.

In 1874, Redhwan Pasha, Commanding the Egyptian Corvette Lateef, closed the port of Bulhar and did not allow any British ship to enter. On this occasion, the British Government had to swallow their pride and told the Political Agent at Aden that, "it would be advisable that some amicable understanding should be come to with the Turks, about the commercial and other advantages, which the British wish to preserve at Berbera and elsewhere. Moreover, as long as these are maintained, we should not oppose the extension of the Turkish power on the African Coast of the Gulf of Aden." Britain at this point of time was not interested in taking on the Ottoman Empire. No matter how much they quarreled, in the end the colonial powers always understood each other and reached a compromise at the expense of the peoples of the territories.

Three years after this incident, the Turkish and British Governments reached an understanding over the Somali territories by concluding a convention on 7 September 1877 for the recognition of Turkey's jurisdiction over the Somali Coast, as far as Ras Hafun. The Khedive (Turkey) agreeing on his part to declare Bulhar and Berbera free ports, and entering into further engagements with regard to commerce and navigation, the appointment of Consular Agents, and the suppression of the slave-trade in the territory so recognized to be under Turkey's jurisdiction. The Turkish Sultan moreover undertook for himself and his successors that no portion of the territory in question shall ever be ceded to any other foreign Power.

Marques of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, wrote in a letter, 1224 dated Foreign Office, London, to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, Sir A.H. Layard, on 10 October 1878.

“In view of the necessity of obtaining supplies for the British station at Aden, it is of importance to Her Majesty’s Government that the ports on the opposite coast should be in the hands of a friendly Power able to keep the native tribes under proper control and willing to allow unrestricted intercourse for British trade.” In the letter His Lordship made an assessment on the condition prevailing in Somalia. He wrote:

“In its normal condition of Somali rule, it had no particular master, each member of the community assembled has a voice in the administration of affairs; hence broils were incessant”. Unfortunately, the conditions in Somalia are not much different in the twenty-first century than described in this letter.

After nearly a year later in 1879, Ambassador Layard informed his government that in his response to his query, he had received an answer¹ from the government of Turkey that it considers that, “authority of the Sultan should be established at once over that country, so as not to permit any foreign influence from taking advantage of the present state of things. Consequently Tewfik Pasha has been directed by telegraph to take possession of it in the name of the Sultan, and to prevent any foreign authority from being established in it on any pretext whatsoever.”

However, next day, 14 July 1879, the Ambassador sent other telegram (N. 548) to his Government, saying that Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey says that note on Somali question, of which “I telegraphed you substance yesterday, was sent to me by mistake, and has withdrawn it.”

In 1880, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Earl Granville, informed the British Agent and Consul-General in Cairo, E.B. Malet, that the British Government wanted one of the Assistants attached at the British Resident at Aden, be given a Consular Commission, which would give him jurisdiction over the territory from Tajoura inclusive to Ras Hafoon, and to enable him to visit the Somali coast.

As the territory was under the Turkish Authority, Melet spoke with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moustapha Pasha Fahmy in Egypt on the subject. After obtaining no objection from the Turkish authority, the British Government appointed Captain F.M. Hunter, who was at the Bombay Staff Corps to the post of 2nd Assistant to the Resident at Aden.

1. NAI, Foreign Department, Telegram N.544, dated 13th July 1879.

SOMALIA - Past & Present Chapter 3: Turkey Withdraws, Britain Comes

Things were changing rapidly. Turkey decided to withdraw from the Horn of Africa. As their withdrawal from the Somali territories became imminent, the British Secretary of State in a letter dated 14 June 1884 ordered that Major F.M. Hunter should be sent to Berbera to facilitate the Turkish evacuation and conclude agreements with the local chiefs on terms similar to agreements signed on Socotra.

The Secretary also said that if it became necessary Aden should be ready to send force to Berbera. Britain already had agreements signed with the Somali tribes, i.e. with the Sheikhs of Habr Awal in Berbera on 6 February 1827 and 7 November 1856 and with the Mijerteyn at Bander Murayeh on 20 February 1866. He suggested that the treaties with the tribes might be supplemented by new agreements about Bulhar with which Aden had much to do.

The Secretary of State went on to give elaborate and detailed description of the coast line, the places of importance for the British and tribes inhabiting and in control of the area. He wrote:

“The next section of the coast line from Zeyla to Ras Hafun is from Berbera to Meyt or Burnt Island. This includes Seyareh belonging to the Habr-tel-Jaalo tribe, and Meyt, which belongs to the Habr Gerhaji tribe”,

“The third section of the coast is from Meyt to Cape Guardafui, and there are several ports of various descriptions. The Chief of them are as follows: - Habr Gori, (sic) belonging Warsangali tribe; this was the starting point of Speke’s journey; Bandar Ziadeh, where the Mijerteyn Somali begin; Bander Khor and Bander Ghashem, trading ports, where a good anchorage can be got; Bander Marayeh, where lives the Sultan, and which possesses a good harbour; and Bander Aluleh, the Chief of which place is one of the parties to the Mijerteyn treaties. All along this section of the coast, we already have entered into friendly relations with the Chiefs, and therefore we can supplement our existing treaties with them. The last

section is from Cape Guardafui to Ras Hafun. The land of Ras Hafun is the only important place. This also belongs to the Mijjerteyn Somali. The best ports and most flourishing of the places thus enumerated in the second division of the coast with its four sections are —

Bulhar,
Berbera,
Meyt,
Bander Ghassem,
Bander Khor,
Bander Marayeh,

Hafun, with the tribes owning all of these, except Meyt, we have already entered into some relations, if not treaties. I presume that Major Hunter will be given a general discretion, but we can mention these ports as deserving attention. It is quite possible that the Mijjerteyn will refuse to sign any treaty.”

On return from Berbera on 15 July 1884, Major Hunter wrote to Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for India in London that he was upset about the news of the British intention on Somaliland that appeared in the Indian newspapers.

Hunter told his Government: “I accordingly proceeded to Berbera before the news could reach the African Coast, and on arrival at that port collected nearly all the responsible elders of the Habr Awal, to the number of 29, and obtained their signatures to the agreement, a copy of which is enclosed”, “Hereafter”, he continued, “It may be desirable to execute agreements with other tribes, but now that Berbera is safe, and our policy understood, the remainder of the Somal (sic) will only be too ready to make treaties with us”. On conclusion of the treaty, Hunter reported that he presented Rs. 1,400 to the various Somali elders and others.

The British Consul saw to it that the treaties with the Somalis would be one-sided and solely in Britain’s interest. Either through coercion or ignorance, the elders signed all the treaties as the British had prepared them. They accepted the condition that no foreign nation would have the right to appoint an Agent to reside in the territories of the Habr Awal without Britain’s consent. The treaties provided that all livestock exported to Aden were to be free of duties of all kinds and no duty was to be charged on articles for the use of the employees of the British Government.

The British Government communicated to France in February 1885 the establishment of the British Protectorate from Ghubet Kharab to Ras Galweni, and the conclusion of agreements with the several Somali tribes. In July 1887 the same communication was sent to other Powers.

Following Treaties were signed with the Somali tribes:

1. Habr Awal tribe, 6 February 1827, Treaty of Peace and Commerce.
2. Habr Garhajis and the Habr Toljaala tribes entered into an Engagement with the Political Resident at Aden 1855 to prohibit the slave trade.
3. Habr Awal tribe, in 1856, to withdraw the blockade of Berbera.

1. Habr Awal, 14 July 1884. Prohibition to cede, or part with, territory save to the British Government; free permission to British vessels to trade with all Habr Awal ports; protection of British subjects in Habr Awal territory; abolition of slave trade; appointment of British agents at Berbera or elsewhere in Habr Awal territories.

Habr Awal, 15th March 1886. Protection by the British of Habr Awal Tribe and territories; prohibition of correspondence or treaty with foreign powers.

2. Habr Toljaala, 26th December 1884. Prohibition to cede; or part with, territory; free permission to British vessels to trade and protection of wrecks and crew of the same; protection of British subjects; abolition of slave trade; appointment of British agents.

Habr Toljaala, 1st February 1886. Protection by the British; prohibition of correspondence or treaty with foreign powers.

3. Habr Garhajis, 13th January 1885. Prohibition to cede, or part, territory; free permission to British vessels to trade; protection of British subjects; abolition of slave trade; appointment of British agents.

Habr Garhajis, 1st February 1886. Protection by the British; prohibition of correspondence or treaty with foreign powers.

4. Warsangeli, 27th January 1886. Protection by the British; prohibition of correspondence or treaty with foreign powers; assistance to wrecks and protection of crews of wrecked vessels; abolition of slave trade; appointment of British agents; assistance to British officers and acceptance of their advice.

5. Gadabursi, 11th December 1884. Prohibition to cede, or part with, territory; free permission to British vessels to trade; protection of British subjects; abolition of slave trade, appointment of British agents.

6. Esa, 31st December 1884. Prohibition to cede, or part, territory; Free permission to British vessels to trade; protection of British subjects; abolition of slave trade; appointment of British agents.

Hunter not only got what he wanted or was asked to obtain from the Somali tribes. But asked his superiors whether it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to make the Somalis pay for the British Agent and his guards, and other necessary administrative charges. "If so", he said, "The customs can be fixed at a rate that will cover such expense, and yield a fair amount of profit to the Habr Awal."

A secret letter in January 1886 (no date) described the British "Protectorate" on the Somali Coast as follows: "Originally the term "Protectorate" was applied only to British relations with Bulhar and Berbera and the intervening coast, which were based upon the first of Major Hunter's treaties, namely that made with the Habr Awal. Following the lines of the Habr Awal, four others have been negotiated with the following tribes:

- (a) The Easa Somalis, between Ghubbet Kharab and Zaila;
- (b) The Gadabursi, to the east of Zaila and between that place and the Habr Awal who then carry on the line to Bulhar;
- (c) The Habr Gerhajis, to the east of Berbera;
- (d) The Habr Tol-Jaala, to the east of the Habr Gerhajis, as far as Hais."

If that was the case, Hargeisa, which became the capital of the entire territory of the British Somaliland, was free from colonial rule. There was no local council of elders to claim authority over it.

In 1891, when the news that the Abyssinians would probably attack Hargeisa reached the British Headquarters in Berbera, the Assistant Resident, Lieutenant H. Merewether suggested two measures: One, that Shaik Mattar (sic) be granted some Baladiyas (Locally recruited guards) at Hargeisa, and two, that he be given a British flag. The British official further informed that Shaikh Mattar had asked him to apply for thirty men for him. The number appeared to the Assistant Resident excessive, but he believed that as Shaik Mattar was one of the few stipendiaries who had consistently rendered good service to the Agency, he certainly deserved all the help the British could give him. The official presumed that if Shaikh Madar would be given the rifles he would find the men. He argued that as regards the flag it would show the Abyssinians clearly that Shaikh Madar was "our servant", and that he believed, was sufficient to give him protection. He thought that the Abyssinians were unlikely to take initiative against Britain, at least for sometime to come.

The British flag was hoisted at Hargeisa by David Morrison, Deputy Assistant Political Agent at Bulhar, on 17 February 1891, at 4:30 p.m. near the mosque and Shaik Madar's house. As Shaikh Madar was not in town, they placed the flag in the custody of his son, named Omar Madar, till the return of his father.

Although Shaik Mattar, (known to the Somalis as Shaikh Madar) was appointed as the custodian of the flag in Hargeisa, the British neither gave him protection nor military support in case of a possible attack by the Abyssinians. On the issue of granting him some security men for defending the interest and the prestige of the British Empire, Major C.W.H. Sealy, Political Agent and Consul, Somali Coast, told the Resident at Berbera:

"There is no objection to your granting Shaik Mattar 15 baladiyas 'as a temporary measure and at his expense', but in the event of an overpowering force of Abyssinians marching on Hargeisa it would be better for Shaik Mattar to 'retire to Berbera', as already suggested in the 7th paragraph of your No.135 of 9th instant." (Emphasis added)

This was how the colonial powers treated even those who were serving their interest. That was not the end of the story. Merewether sent by a special messenger, via Bulhar, a letter to Shaikh Madar, stating:

“These are the Sirkars’ orders regarding your kariya (Village):

“The flag which Mr. Morrison hoisted you will pull down and keep. Should any spies or single individual visit you to collect information for our enemies show it to them. Should any large force come near you re-hoist it. Should any larger force come against you retire with all speed to Berbera.”

“Do not fear, the Sirkar knows everything and is doing what is best for everybody. Regarding the Biladias let me know if you are prepared to pay and feed so many yourself. May you be preserved.”

By telling Shaikh Madar, “Should any large force come against, you retire with all speed to Berbera”, meant that the British colonial administration was not ready to defend Hargeisa in case of an Abyssinian attack.

On 29 July 1891, the Secretary to the Government of Bombay (British Colonial Office in India), Political Department, W. Le-Warner, reported that Merewether, Assistant Resident at Berbera, had privately recovered the British flag that was in the possession of Shaikh Madar. Le-Warner admitted, “It became necessary to act secretly in this matter, because if it became publicly known that the flag had been withdrawn, the effect upon the Somalis would have been bad.”

The British Administration stayed in the Northern Region of Somalia and in 1943, following the defeat of Italy in the Second World War, added the Southern part of Somali territory which had been under Italy’s occupation since 1889. The United Kingdom handed over the former Italian Somaliland to the United Nations in 1950 when the country was placed under the UN Trusteeship for ten years, while retaining British Somaliland.

SOMALIA - Past & Present Chapter 4: French Somaliland

The scramble for the Somali territories continued with accelerated speed. After Britain, France entered into the colonial race with the signing of a treaty for “peace and friendship” with the Chiefs of the Danakil tribes on the coast of Aden on 11 March 1862. The treaty gave it a large piece of territory exclusively. According to Article 3 of the treaty France agreed to give 10,000 Talaris, that was then equal to 55,000 Francs.”

The treaty guaranteed several rights for construction and grazing to the Frenchmen settled in Obokh. The most important clause of the treaty was that the Chiefs “engage themselves singly or collectively to decline any overtures which may not have met with the approval of the Government of His Majesty, Emperor of France”. This was the same provision that the British had inserted in their treaties with the Chiefs.

Twenty-two years after France signed the treaty, the French Commandant of Obokh signed two treaties in 1884; the first with the Sultan of Gobad in April and the second with the Sultan of Tajourra in October. The treaty with the Sultan of Gobad conferred on the French several rights for carrying on commercial activities and the rights of construction in his territory. It again provided for an undertaking by the Sultan that he would “conclude no convention and sign no treaty without the assent of the chief of the colony of Obokh”. The treaty signed with the Sultan of Tajourra was even more astounding. The Article 2 of the treaty stated that Sultan Hamad “gives his country to France in order that the latter may protect him against every foreign power”. Article 5 promised, “Not to sign any treaty with any foreign nation without the assent of the Commandant of Obokh”.

Another treaty between M. Legarde, the French Commandant of the colony of Obokh, acting on behalf of the Government of France and Chiefs of the Easa Somali tribe was signed on 26 March 1885. According to which the Chiefs gave their territory to France and undertook to “assist France on all occasions and not to sign any treaty or conclude any Convention without the consent of the Commandant of the Colony of Obokh.”

Article I of the Treaty said that, “There shall be eternal friendship between France and the Issa Chiefs and Article II said: “The Chiefs give their country to France in order that it (the latter) may protect it against all foreigners.”

In the year 1885, a bill was presented to the French Chamber of Deputies to open a credit of Fr.624,720.00 for the Minister of Marine and Colonies, “on account of the organization of the Colony of Obokh, and of the French Protectorate over Tajourra and the neighbouring territories up to Gubbet-Kharab”.

The British pragmatically accepted the French rights over the Somali territory. On 15 April 1887, the British Secretary of State sent a letter to the Viceroy in India saying “We agree to recognize French protectorate west of line drawn from Jibuti to Harrar. French agree to recognize our protectorate from Jibute to 49th parallel, to withdraw claims to Gadabursi and

Jibril Abukars, and will take necessary measures for suppressing slave trade and importation of arms.” However, the British authorities were uncomfortable with idea of French competing with them.

The British officials in Zeyla were asking themselves, “What measures have the French taken at Jibuti in order to compete with Zeyla?” Captain C.E. Gissing, R.N. Commander and Senior Officer, Aden, in a letter dated 6 September 1888, replied to Colonel E.V. Stace, British Agent and Consul for the Somali Coast, Aden that the French are doing everything to promote their interest. They were giving presents and the Roman Catholic missionaries were also promoting French interest.

“Shortly after the opening of Jibuti, M. Legarde went to Europe and left Burhan, son of Abubeker, the late Pasha of Zeyla, in charge. Burhan wrote letters to merchants at Zeyla, Aden, and Harrar, advising them of the opening of Jibuti as a free port. The French Governor of Obokh and his agents have endeavoured to obtain Makunan’s (Governor of Harrar) aid in compelling caravans to go to Jibuti instead of Zeyla. Makunan has been promised the free importation of arms through Jibuti in return for his assistance in this matter.

In one of the French documents Djibouti was described as follows:

“General state of affairs at Jibuti—The harbour is an excellent one, easy of access and well protected; buoys show the position of the shoals; boats can land at any time of tide on the beach; water is plentiful about 1 ½ miles from the town, and is very good and sweet; there is good feed for camels, &c., near the water; sheep and cattle are abundant and cheap.

“Buildings—Two stone houses are being built; stone for building (coral) is obtainable in any quantity, also lime; quarters are being built for the troops and police; there are forty Soudanese soldiers and twenty police armed with rifles; the native houses are well built and the town clean; there is a stone building at the landing place for office and house for the Resident; one Greek keeps a store, and several Arabs have shops; there are four small guns in position—7-pounders; the place is stated to be very healthy and free of fever.

“Free Port—There has been no Proclamation, but Burhan wrote to merchants at Aden, Zeyla, and Harrar, asking them to trade through Jibuti, there being no duty there.

“Transfer of Jibuti—It is rumoured at Jibuti that the French are going to transfer that port to Abyssinia; the people there talk about it as an arranged affairs.

“Agent of Menelek of Shoa—There is an agent of King Menelek at Jibuti; his name is Osman; he is a relation of King Menelek; he returns with the caravan which conveys the arms. He has also a quantity of goods at Jibuti, which he is taking up-country. Whether he is there only for the arms or also for the cession of the port, I do not know.

“Tajourra—Tajourra Chief has a Russian as well as a French flag, but the Russian flag he keep in his house. The Russian party had thirty Abyssinians armed with rifles, which they had hired at Tajourra, of whom there are twelve remaining with them. These Russians have arms, but they do not sell them at Tajourra; there are six Russians now there, they state they are waiting for orders; the natives say their provisions are finished. I cannot exactly see why the Russians are there, and, curiously enough, they have given a Russian flag to the Chief. It seems curious their remaining so many months. The natives say they have given money to the Chief, but whether they go to Abyssinia or remain at Tajourra seems doubtful. It nearly seems as though the French had some idea of ceding Tajourra to Russia. I cannot hear of any Russians being in any other place but this. The French Company have sold 300 stand of arms in Tajourra to the natives, some muzzle some breech-loading. Natives say the arms are brought from Obokh by dhow, and they can buy as many as they like from the sailing-ship at Obokh.

The Railway between Djibouti and Ethiopia -- The following letter was written from the British Foreign Office the Law Officers of the Crown, dated, Foreign Office, September 10, 1902. Regarding the Agreement of the 9th March 1897, by which Emperor Menelek of Abyssinia gave permission to M. Ilg, a Swiss engineer, and His Majesty’s Principal Adviser, to form a Company for the construction of a railway from the port of Jibuti, in the French Somaliland, to Harrar, in Abyssinia, and thence to Antoto and the White Nile.

On the 6th February last the “Compagnie Imperiale des Chemins de Fer Ethiopiens,” the Company formed in accordance with the permission given by the Emperor, concluded a Convention with the Government of French Somaliland, by which

the latter granted to the Company on certain conditions an annual subvention of 500.000 fr. (20.000/.) for fifty years. The Convention contained inter alia the following stipulations:

“Article V provides that in future all members of the Council of Administration shall be Frenchmen, except in special cases sanctioned by the Ministers of the Colonies and of Foreign Affairs.

“By Article VI the Company is forbidden to modify the course of the railway or to authorise the construction of any branch lines without the consent of the aforesaid Ministers.

“Article XIX provides that, at the end of ninety-nine years from the opening of the line to Addis Harar, the French Somali Coast Protectorate shall succeed to all the rights of the Company over the section of the railway between Jibuti and Addis Harar.

“By Article XV the Protectorate has the right of acquiring by purchase the portion of the line between Jibuti and the course of the Hawash at any time after the 1st January 1920.”

These two latter provisions are, however, by Article XVIII, made subject to an Agreement between the French and Abyssinian Governments in regards to those portions of the line, which are outside French territory.

There were times when the powers discussed among themselves about exchanging Djibouti for other territories or passing it over to others. On 21st September 1891, The British Ambassador sent the following letter (Confidential) to the Marquis of Salisbury, K.G., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London: “In compliance with his promise, recorded in my telegram N.44 of yesterday, the Marquis di Rudini has forwarded to me confidentially a copy of the telegram received by the Italian Government on Saturday from their Consul at Aden.

The text of the telegram, in translation, runs as follows:

“A large caravan with important Abyssinian personages has arrived at Ras Jibuti. There is continued talk of the cession of the port of Jibuti to Menelek. Lagarde is expected at Obokh on the 24th instant, it is said, with instruction to treat, respecting the cession of Jibuti, with the Abyssinian Chieftains.

“The Marquis di Rudini mentioned that the Italian Agent at Aden was a very reliable officer, and unlike to be led away by a mere rumour.”

In January 1914, Thesiger had first reported that he could see no prospect of any amelioration in the situation unless the British persuaded France to exchange French Somaliland for territory elsewhere. When he brought forward this proposal, Thesiger had suggested Gambia for exchange, “but the scheme for certain reasons did not commend itself to His Majesty’s Government.”

In 1917, the British Foreign Office sent a telegram to their Mission in Cairo (letter N.264 dated March 1917) quoting “the Foreign Office members of the committee” as saying: “As regards Somaliland, they suggested that in the event of our being able to obtain by exchange French Somaliland, we might give British Somaliland to Italy.

“I should be grateful for your views as to this proposal and as to whether we could in any case surrender British Somaliland, supposing we did not acquire French Somaliland.”

The letter also said, “The Foreign Office representatives point out that Italian aspirations are probably directed to British East Africa and they recommend that if such proposals are received, they should be considered.”

According to Somali Government official publication, “The Portion of Somali Territory Under Ethiopian Colonization”, dated 1974, “In a BBC broadcast on 28th August 1966, Emperor Haile Selassie is reported to have said “If Somalis gave up claiming French Somaliland, Ethiopia will thank God; I would like France to stay in the French Somali Coast for ever.” However, that sinister wish of the Emperor did not materialise. In 1967, France decided to hold a referendum in French Somaliland. As the outcome of the referendum went against what France desired and following the uprising of the people of Djibouti against the French occupation, the French Government decided to change the name of the territory from “French Somali Coast” (Cote Francaise des Somalis) to “The French Territory of Afars and Issas (Le Territoire Francaise des Afars and des Issas) by Law N. 67-521 dated 3 July 1967.

The purpose for this change was clear; it was to eliminate the word “Somali” from the territory’s name and to create enmity among the people of the territory so that it could apply the policy of “divide and rule”.

In 1975, the French Government began to increasingly accommodate insistent demands for independence of the people of the French Coast of the Somalis. The people voted for independence in a May 1977 referendum, and on 27 June 1977 the country gained its independence and the Republic of Djibouti was born.

Haji Hassan Gulaid Aptidon became the first democratically elected President of the country. Unlike in some part of Africa, where Presidents stick on to power until they die or deposed by military coup, President Hassan Gouled Aptidon announced that he would not seek re-election in 1999. Ismail Omar Guelleh, was directly elected President of the Republic of Djibouti on 9 April 1999. Born on 27 November 1947, Ismail Omar Guelleh was reelected as the President of the Republic of Djibouti in the presidential election held on 8 April 2005.

The President of Djibouti is elected for a term of six years. He appoints a Prime Minister, who heads the Council of Ministers. The legislative body is formed by the *Chambre des Deputes*, which consists of 65 members which are elected every five years.

The Republic of Djibouti is situated in the Horn of Africa. It is a member of the African Union and the League of Arab States, as well as of the regional organization Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which also includes Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Sudan and Uganda.

SOMALIA Past & Present Chapter 5: Abyssinian Invasion and Occupation of Harrar

The Acting Consul for the Somali Coast, Captain Sealy reported on 10 July 1883 to the British Consul General in Cairo, Sir E.B. Melet, that Menelek of Shoa “is about to march on Harrar with 60,000 men.” This information was given to him by Abubakr Pasha of Zaila. One of his sons was in Shoa. Sealy said that he was not sure whether there was any truth in the news and asked for information on the subject and the cause of the threatened attack. Later, in August, Melet informed the Government that there was no foundation for the earlier report that King Menelek of Shoa was about to march on Harrar.

But the rumours regarding Menelek’s march did not die. Four years later, on 22 January 1887, Major Hunter, who was the official who had made the Somalis sign the Protectorate Treaties a year earlier, reported that Menelek of Shoa “was within three days’ march of Harrar, and that the Emir had gone out with all his force to fight the Abyssinians, who were to be accompanied by several Italians.”

Jebriil Marijou, interpreter of Menelek, who had been in Zeyla for some days past, informed M. Estemios Moussaya that at the instigation of the French, the King was about to attack Harrar. In fact, the rumour was a screen behind which the real action was going on. An army of 15,000 men of which 5,000 were cavalry and remainder infantry and artillery were on the move to invade Harrar.

After invading and occupying Harrar, on 8 January (20 January 1887) Menelek wrote the following letter to the British Consul at Aden:

“From Menelek, King of Shoa and of all the Galla, good and bad,
“To the English Consul at Aden,

“How are you”

“By the Grace of God, I am well. Amir Abdillahi would suffer no Christian in his country.

“He was another “Gragne” but by the help of God I fought him, destroyed him and he escaped alone on horseback.

“I hoisted my flag in his capital and my troops, &c., occupied his city, Gragne died: Abdillahi was in our days his successor.

“This is not a Mussalman country as every one knows”.

The British Consul Major Hunter wrote back 10 February, 1887:

“After compliments— We have received Your Majesty’s friendly letter informing us that you captured and occupied Harrar and hoisted your flag there.

“There can be no need to recall the terms of the treaty concluded with Her Majesty the Queen in 1841 by Your Majesty’s predecessor King Sahela Selassie, Negus of Shoa, Efat and Galla.

“Your Majesty may rest assured of the continued friendship of the British Government, and we hope that under Your Majesty’s protection may revive and the trade route be safe.

“On all the Somali Coast from Ghubbet Kharab, and especially at Zaila, Bulhar and Berbera, where our troops are now stationed, we shall always be glad to further Your Majesty’s interests”.

1. Rennell Rodd was appointed on 24 February 1897 as the British Special Envoy of Queen Victoria to King Menelek. In a letter to Marquess of Salisbury, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Rodd wrote about the Abyssinians:

“The Abyssinians themselves are a military race in a perpetual state of mobilization. They inhabit circular huts of mud and wattle roofed with thatch, even the great Chiefs contenting themselves with such a modest domicile, while their followers pitch their tents round about compound of their masters, and the suggestion of permanency is certainly absent from their habitations.”

Speaking about the Abyssinian soldiers, Rodd, wrote, “The soldier lives for the most part sparingly, and is satisfied with the rude (crude) sour bread manufactured in the country, which, seasoned with pepper and, more rarely, with meat, forms his only food. The desire of a better mode of existence appears to be entirely absent. At the same time, in order to secure the little that is necessary, as he doest work himself, it must be wrung from the subject races.”

He added: “Preserving their supremacy and extending their borders of recent years over the savage races by which they are surrounded, then have become a dominant military caste, for whom occupation in warlike enterprises must be found continually to compensate them for the extremely scanty pay and indifferent nourishment which they receive”.

He further described the Abyssinians as: “War waged, as a rule, upon weaker races who are without adequate arms to resist his incursion successfully, raiding, in other words, is his real occupation, and the prospect of plunder his incentive”.

2. Wilfred Thesiger, in his book “The Life of My Choice”, wrote:

“The Amharas and Tigreyans, as opposed to the Galla and the other tribes they had incorporated into their empire, resembled no other race in appearance or character. They regarded themselves, however fallaciously, as light-skinned; in their paintings they were invariably shown full face and almost white, whereas their enemies were always depicted in profile and black, unless they were Europeans. Before he was incapacitated, Menelik had won recognition for his conquests and acceptance of his new frontiers. He had incorporated into his empire, the Ogaden, the town of Harrar, the lands of the Galla tribes, the Gurage country, the ancient kingdom of Kaffa, and the Anuak and other tribes on the borders of the Sudan.” (London 1988, pp.43-44)

Major Polson Newman in his book “Ethiopian Realities”, narrates that when Emperor Theodore earlier in his life was at a monastery “he first heard of the prophecy that there would one day appear in Ethiopia a king called Theodore, who would rule justly and righteously, would wipe out Islam from the world, and would take Jerusalem and reign over a world that would be entirely Christian.”

Major Newman chronologically lists the Amhara territories and the territories conquered by Menelek as follows:

AMHARA TERRITORIES: Amhara, Tigre, Gojjam, and Shoa.

TERRITORIES CONQUERED BY MENELIK

As King of Shoa:

1886. Guma. Gomma. Ghera. Limmu. Gimma (as protectorate).

1887. Harar. Gurage. Galla Tulama (conquest begun).

1889, Cambatta.

As Emperor of Ethiopia:

1890. Leca Galla. Jianjero.

1893. Wolamo. Sidamo. Galla Tulama (conquest completed).

1894. Ogaden (conquest begun). Imi.

1895. Arussi.
1897. Ogaden (conquest completed). Kaffa. Jambo. Gimira Conso. Burghi.
1899. Gubba. Gunza. Beni Shangul. Boran.
1900, Nilotic Tribes.
1909, Aussa, Beru, Teru.
Gimma was annexed by the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1935.³

1. NAI, Foreign Department, Somali Coast-Shoa and Harrar affairs, 1883, New Delhi, India.
2. NAI, Foreign Department, Red Sea and Somali Coast, Confidential, May 14, 1897, New Delhi.
3. Major Polson Newman, Ethiopian Realities, George and Unwin, London, 1936.

SOMALIA - Past & Present Chapter 6: Abyssinian Somaliland

King Menelik sent the following a circular on 10 April 1891 to European Heads of State in which he outlined the boundaries he claimed for his empire: “While tracing today the actual boundaries of my Empire, I shall endeavour, if God gives me life and strength, to re-establish the ancient frontier (tributaries) of Ethiopia up to Khartoum, and as far as Lake Nyanza with all the Gallas.”

To seek a favourable response for his claim, he underlined his Christian credentials. He wrote, “Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian island in a sea of Pagans. If Powers at distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator.”

“As the almighty has protected Ethiopia up to this day, I have confidence He will continue to protect her and increase her borders in the future. I am certain He will not suffer her to be divided among other Powers.

“Formerly the boundary of Ethiopia was the sea. Having lacked strength sufficient and having received no help from Christian Powers, our frontier on the sea coast fell into the power of the Mussulman”, Menelik said.

“At present we do not intend to regain our sea frontier by force, but we trust that the Christian Powers, guided by our Saviour, will restore to us our sea-coast line at any rate, certain points on the coast.”

King Menelek presented himself as the defender of the Faith in Africa against the possible designs of the Muslims. It would appear that his plea struck sympathetic cord in the hearts of some Europeans. His plan received support from European Governments. Rennell Rodd openly justified and encouraged King’s claim that his country too should have its share of the African territories to be divided among the colonial powers.

In a report to the Government, Rodd said: “It will be enough here to state that it has become sufficiently effective to make it an extremely difficult task to negotiate with a King, who, fully confident that his pretensions had been made publicly known and had remained undisputed; confident, moreover, that, as a Christian African Power, his claims to a sphere of influence were better founded than those of Powers whose seat of Government is in another continent.”

On 8 December 1885 King John of Abyssinia told Queen Victoria among other things: “The Kings of England before Queen Victoria, and the rest of the Christian Kings of the world, were friendly with the Abyssinians, and waged war against the Moslems to convert to Christianity; but they never interfered with the Abyssinians because they were Christians. I have said this openly and frankly to you because we are Christians, and have confidence in each other.” Time has changed, people have changed, but the guiding principle of Abyssinia remains the same.

Britain had signed protection treaties with the Somalis in the last quarter of the 19th century, but even then it had no intention of defending the Somali people or risk the lives of their citizens for the Somali territories. The British officials were concerned some of them pondered what they would do if the Abyssinians decided to give effect to their claim. W. Lee Warner, an official in the Political and Secret Department of India Office, contended in a report dated 25 November 1896, that the British established Civil Criminal Courts on the Coast, rebuilt Berbera in 1888, fortified the ports, erected jails and “in many effective ways established ourselves. “Our garrison consists of barely 200 men scattered about.” Le Warner argued, “We have no force at Aden or on the coast which can resist Abyssinian incursions. If we remain, the settlement of our limits with Abyssinia seems an urgent and immediate necessity. If we retire, we had better do so in

accordance with settled plan and without unnecessary appearance of compulsion. The failure of Italy to hold her African protectorate without collusion with Abyssinia has its lessons”.

Lee-Warner’s suggestion was a clear betrayal of the trust that the Somalis bestowed on Britain and a flagrant violation of the treaties signed by them which created the British Protectorate. In all the protectorate treaties signed by the Somali Elders of the tribes, there was a clause which prohibited the Somalis to enter into correspondence or treaty with any other foreign power or to cede, or part with, territory. Britain was not bound by that clause, and considered itself free to cede, or sell Somali territories to whomsoever they wished. There were no clauses that prohibited the British “to cede” Somali territories to others, and the Somalis being so ignorant of what would happen in the future, just signed or put their thumb mark on the treaties by which the destiny of their own homeland was to be decided.

Le-Warner said: “If we only want food supplies from the coast, we can still get them without asserting by force our right to the whole of the Protectorate as delimited with Italy. Three solutions are possible. Events will show which is the best of them:

1. We can abandon not merely Biyo Kaboba actually held by Abyssinian, but also a considerable part of hinterland, retaining the ports.
2. If that will not secure peaceful occupation, we can give Abyssinia one of our ports.
3. If events prove that we cannot remain on the coast without a strong military establishment there, we might retire altogether, making a treaty with Abyssinia that live-stock shall be exported free, that imports and exports from Zaila and Berbera shall not be charged more than the present, and the ports shall not be given to any European power without our leave.

He also said: “The next step, I think, is to follow the precedent of 1877, and address the Foreign Office an enquiry whether:

1. We must deal in this matter with Makunan or with Menelek;
2. We can assign Zaila to Abyssinia, if such surrender seems desirable (a) without further reference to Turkey, (b) without reference to France our neighbour at Jabuti.

To show how much the British cared less about the Somalis and how they wished to appease Abyssinia at the expense of Somalia, the British colonial officer told his government: “As to whether it is fair on the tribes, with whom we have protectorate treaties, to abandon them, that is a question which we must consider ourselves”.

2 Earlier Captain Hunter too argued in a memorandum he sent to his government in 1884 saying: “This Residency has no knowledge of, or concern with, Abyssinian politics; but with France at Tajourra, Turkey at Zeila, and Italy at Assab, Southern Abyssinia will be pretty well dominated by other European powers”. He believed that to prevent this domination by another European Power and to maintain their own Britain could pursue another alternative. He wrote:

“There is one alternative which can be suggested as regards Tajourah and Zeylah, but it is not possible for this Residency to pronounce on its merits. Let Tajourra and Zeylah be offered by the British to King Menelek of Shoa on such conditions as Her Majesty’s Government think suitable. The local tribes, there is reason to believe, would not oppose such a course, and if we do not give Menelek a port, France or Italy will, for Obokh and Assab were acquired, we all think here, principally with the object of treating favourably with the King of Shoa”.

3 This was the bitter fact. The British cared more for the provision for Aden than the Somali people and their territories. They cared for their friendship with the Abyssinians than with the Somalis. However, by sheer luck, the British intention did not materialise, other wise, not only Ogaden, but also a big portion of the Somalia’s northern region would have been today under the Ethiopia rule.

1. Foreign Department, Secret E, October 1891, N.233-249, NAI, New Delhi, India.
2. NAI, Foreign Department, Secret letter N.189, dated 28 October 1896, New Delhi, India
3. NAI, Foreign Department, Letter N.3478, dated Bombay Castle, 4 July 1884, Confidential, New Delhi.

SOMALIA - Past & Present Chapter 7: Italian Somaliland

Italy started colonisation of Africa around 1885. By then Britain and France were already in the North of Somalia. The coast of Benadir, the port of Kisimayo, Brava, Merca, Mogadishu and Warsheikh were the dependencies of the Sultan of

Zanzibar. The rest of the territories were divided among the various Somali tribes. The sovereignty of the Sultan of Zanzibar over these ports was recognized by Germany, France and Great Britain in June 1886.

The Italian intervention began with the signing of the commercial treaty of 28 May 1885, precisely few weeks after the Italian occupation of Massawa on 5 February of the same year, when the ship Barbarigo was sent to Zanzibar for the purpose of visiting the coastal territories which were under the Sultan and to explore the outlet of Giuba River.

1| On 17 March 1886 in London the German Ambassador Count Hatzfeldt verbally informed the British Foreign Office that on 6 September 1885 the German East African Company had signed a treaty with the principal Chief of the Mijerteyn Somalis, the Sultan Osman Mahamoud Youssouf at Alula. Under this treaty the whole Somali territory from the east of the town of Berbera to Cape (Ras) Asurad was ceded to the German company. The representative of the company had also signed a treaty with the Sultan Yussuf Ali Yussuf, the Ruler of the Somali town of Obbia (Hobbiah), whereby the company acquired the entire territory between Obbia and the town of Warshaikh with all the sovereign rights. The territory belonged to the Sultan of Zanzibar and was on the one side between the Indian Ocean and the Galla frontier and about twenty-five days' journey inland on the other. Count Hatzfeldt informed that on the strength of these treaties, the German East African Company had asked the German Government to undertake the Protectorate over the Somali coast, and make sure that no encroachment by England was made on their rights.

Four months later, Sultan Yusuf Ali visited Aden and met with the British Consul, Major F.M. Hunter. The latter discussed with the Sultan about the agreement German claimed to have concluded with the Mijerteyn Chief. During the meeting the two sides discussed bilateral agreement. Afterward the British official reported to his Government that Sultan Yusuf Ali made the following statement:

“I was not present when the agreement was made between Sultan Osman and the German, but I have seen the Arabic copy.

“I do not recollect what the preamble said as to the actual parties making the agreement, whether it was on behalf of themselves or of their Governments.

“The substance was that the German were to be allowed to trade and were entitled to protection; the consideration was 1,000 dollars payable to the Sultan and 1,000 dollars to myself annually. There was no mention of sovereignty or territorial rights, or flag. When the second time the Germans came I was present; they asked for the Sultan's flag to fly on their boat for protection. They also wanted to build a house and fly their own flag over it. Both these requests were refused. We have not received any portion of the annual stipend, but we have accepted presents of cloth.

“Since I arrived at Aden, I visited the German Agent Max Winter here and showed him the paragraph from the “Standard” about his Company having annexed the Somali country from near Berbera to Warsheikh; he declared he knew nothing of any such intimation having been published.”

The British themselves claimed to have already established contact with the Chiefs of the Mijerten and signed agreement with the Chief of Alula in March 1879. In October 1880, Acting Political Resident, Aden, Major G.R. Goodfellow, was sent to Alula to deliver the ratified copy of the agreement to Sultan Yusuf Ali. But the Sultan was out of town.

In a letter to C. Gonne, Chief Secretary to Government of Bombay, dated Aden Residency, 15 October 1880, Major Goodfellow reported:

“I regret to say that in consequence of the Sultan's absence from Mareyeh, in the interior, his representatives there would not receive the treaty, or amount of subsidy due, from Commander Byle, R.N. A local copy of the Convention was delivered to Yousuf Ali, who accepted it. A sum of dollars 150 was expended in presents, for which the sanction of Government is solicited.”

On 16 January 1883, Brigadier-General J. Blair, V.C., British Political Resident at Aden, wrote the following letter to the Sultan Othman Mahmoud:

“It is not hid from you, oh, friend, that in March 1879 you and the other Chiefs of the Mijerteyn entered into an agreement with Major Goodfellow, and that this agreement has been ratified by the Governor General of India. We now send you our

Acting First Assistant Resident, Captain Sealy, who will deliver to you the copy of the ratified agreement.

“It is also known to you that the arrears of the stipend mentioned in the said agreement are due to you and Captain Sealy is authorized to pay you the same, amounting to 720 dollars, to March 1882.”

The British official also said:

“You will also recollect that the Great Government was pleased with your kind treatment of the crew of the wrecked steamer Fleur Castle, last year, and we have much pleasure to informing you that Captain Sealy is commissioned to deliver to you 500 dollars, which the Great Government desires to give you as a mark of appreciation of the services rendered by you on that occasion. This is quite separate from the payment mentioned in the agreement.

“We rely on your friendship to meet the wishes of the Great Government in the above matters. May you be preserved”. Sultan Osman Mohamud sent a letter dated 19 February 1883 to the British Political Resident in which he said:

“We received your kind letter, and the same day we visited Captain Sealy, on which occasion he delivered to us 500 dollars, which the Government had ordered to be given to us as recompense for the treatment shown by us to the steamer wrecked at Ras Asir.

“As regards the agreement, we are willing to agree to all terms in it except the lighthouse. God willing, we will send some men to you on our behalf. On meeting together we will converse and salutation.”

Three years later in 1889, the German Government asked the British Government for the permission to recruit, within the British Protectorate on the Somali Coast, a small force of as it said of blacks that were indentured to serve as police in the territories of the German Company at Zanzibar. But the British considered it “extremely undesirable to accustom the Somalis to the use of firearms.”

The British Political Resident at Aden, Brig. General A.G.F. Hogg, reported in a letter dated 24 April 1889 that in accordance with the instructions received from the Secretary of State for India (Foreign Office, London) September last, the Italians were permitted to enlist Somalis for service at Massawah. About 150 men were regularly trained in the use of firearms during the last six months, and have now been sent back to Aden.

The Political Resident argued: “If foreign nations are thus permitted to train the Somalis to the use of firearms, and then send them back to their own country, most undesirable results will ensue; and I trust that future permission may be refused to any foreign nation for their enlistment as soldiers of Somalis within our Protectorate.”

“Possession by the Arabs of rifles, is becoming very common indeed, and if Somalis receive a military training, they are certain to use every endeavour to obtain possession of firearms which are now almost unknown in their country”, he said.

At the end of 1888, the Sultan of Obbia requested Italy for protection. The “Acceptance Act” was signed in Obbia on 8 February 1889 by Italian Consul Cavaliere V. Filonardi and Sultan Yusuf Ali. With this treaty all the possession of the Sultan from El-Marek to Ras Auad passed under the protection of the Government of Italy. Italian Foreign Minister Rudini informed the Italian Parliament that the treaty of protection placed the Sultan and his possessions under the protection of the Italian Government, undertaking not to make, without the consent of the latter, treaties or contracts with any other Government or person whatever. In compensation, an annuity of 1,200 dollars was granted to Sultan Yusuf Ali Yusuf.

The Minister told the Parliament, “Being a region bordering the sea, the Protectorate over the Sultanate of Obbia was notified to the Powers in the telegram of the 3 March and the Circular of the 11 May 1889, according to Article XXXIV of the General Act of the Berlin Conference.”

The Sultan of the Mijerteyn reached an agreement with Italy on 7 April 1889 at Bender Alula. The Agreement placed under the Italian protection the Sultan’s possession on the Indian Ocean from Ras Auad to Ras el Kyle, including Nogal Valley, promising that he would not enter into further treaties with other Powers for the remaining territories in his possession.

The Acts relative to this Protectorate were ratified on 7 April 1889. They bear on the part of the Italian Government the signatures of Cavaliere Filonardi and the Commanders of the Royal ships Rapido and Staffetta and the other contracting party emissary of Sultan Osman Mahmud.

3 The way the colonial powers acted showed that they consulted with each other well before taking over a territory. They decided among themselves which power takes what. Before taking over the Somali territory, the Italian Government asked the British whether they had any objection to the Italian occupation. The British Secretary of State informed the British Viceroy in India on 3 January 1889 that Italy “proposes to occupy or protect territories from eastern limit of British protectorate of the Somali Coast as far as the border of Zanzibar and asked whether “India (British Authority) has anything to say against the proposal.” The answer came within two days saying that, “They had no objection.”

Italy took possession of the Somali territories on the coast of Benadir from the Sultan of Zanzibar through a treaty signed on 12 August 1892 and it was presented before the Italian Parliament by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 1 June 1896 and was approved as Law No. 373 of 11 August 1896.

Article I of the Treaty stated;

“the Government of H.M. the Sultan of Zanzibar accords to the Government of H.M. the King of Italy, all the ports which he possesses on the cities and ports of Benadir namely Brava, Merka and Mogadishu, with a radius towards the interior of 10 maritime miles, Warshaikh, a radius of 5 maritime miles, besides the islands and the nearby small islands, to be administered politically and juridically in the name of the Government of H.M. the Sultan of Zanzibar and under the protection of his flag; but is agreed that the Government of the H.M. of the Sultan will neither be responsible nor called to regulate the administration or others such as what might come as a result of the conflict of price of blood nor any complain that may arise.”

According to the Treaty, the Italian Government and its representatives had the right to buy and to dispose the public lands only within the limits of the above territories. The Sultan granted to the Italian Government the right to establish a bank or more banks in the cities which were subject of the Convention, with exclusive privilege to issue bank-notes or gold currencies, silver and of copper.

Article VII of the Treaty stated said:

“All the above-mentioned powers, rights and privileges are accorded to H.M. the King of Italy or to his representatives for the period of 25 European years which will start from the day in which the present concession will be approved by the Government of H.M. the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, the Empress of India and by the H.M. the King of Italy.” At the end of the 25 years the agreement was renewable for the same period and on the same conditions and with a simple declaration to this effect by the Government of the King of Italy.

By Article VIII Italy pledged to pay to the Sultan of Zanzibar the sum of 40,000.- Rupees as initial payment when the Italian administration took over the ports, the cities and the territories. At the expiry of each quarter of the European year a sum of Rupees 40,000 was to be paid.

On 10 October 1892 the Sultan of Obbia wrote to Filonardi, the architect of the Italian colonial administration in Somalia: “We inform that this year we have been abandoned and there was no steamboat that has come to us, as it was the practice. Nobody has brought to us the woods and we have neither food nor cartridges.

There was a serious war this year. The inhabitants of the desert have rebelled against us and there was a fighting in which some of ours have been killed.

After the departure of the steamboat Esfita we hoped some one would come from your side, but until now nobody came. On the date of this letter Abu Bakr bin Auad has arrived bringing to us the payment of the year 1891.

We hope you will help us with food and the supply of war material, because we are under your protection and your flag. We would not think that you have abandoned us.

Now we wish your arrival together with what we have requested. Abu Bakr bin Auad will give full information.

We hope that you come soon; this year to negotiate together.
Now we have two countries: Obbia and Fil Hur and we have many soldiers different than before.

Those of our friends killed are 11.

Our saia (boat) has broken down this year at Obbia with some of our properties on board. We need money and we are without boat. You are our friend and we do not know other Christians besides you, and we defend your flag.

On October 19, 1892 (27 Rabi El Aual, 1310), the Sultan of Majerteyn, Osman Mohamud Jusuf, similarly wrote the following letter from Alula, to Signor Filonardi:

“Since long we have not seen you and we have a great desire to see you.

You are our friend and we do not know why you have abandoned us.

The steam boat Esfita has arrived this year, but without you. Now we hope to have the pleasure of seeing you, because friendship and affection exist between us.

Kindly bring to us the rifles and the cartridges of which we have spoken about with you last year, because the rebellion has increased around us. We expect assistance from you because you are our friend and you will do it.

On the date of this (letter) Abu Bakr has arrived here bringing to us the salary of the year; we have recommended him to give detailed information.

When you come here we will understand each other.

We want barut (gun powder) for the ofiat, the seats and the other furniture.

We wish to construct a stone house in your name. For you we wish to work and we shall agree at which site the house will be built.

The tone of these two letters show that instead of behaving like Sultans that they were, they wrote like humble subordinates begging for money, guns and bullets for use against those who were opposed to their rule. They even offered themselves to work for Filonardi who was just a junior officer. The Italians were behaving like the Lords of the land. In July 1893 Filonardi issued a bank note for the denomination of Rupees 5.....continued

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