

July 13, 1977

CONFLICT IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

THE ISSUE

The Horn of Africa comprises those nations on the north-eastern coast of the African continent that border the Red Sea and its outlet into the Gulf of Aden (and, thence, to the Indian Ocean). The most important nations here are Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and most recently, the newly independent Republic of Djibouti. Although the area is of little importance economically - these nations are among the poorest in the world - in recent years internal instability, increasingly strained relations among the Horn nations, a strengthened Soviet presence, and a weakening American role in the area have all contributed to the importance of the Horn in international politics. Despite the poverty and weakness of these countries, their location controls passage from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, political control of these countries permits logistical access to other countries in both North and Central Africa as well as to the Arabian peninsula and the Middle East.

The importance of the Horn of Africa is, therefore, almost entirely political and strategic. Recent developments in the U.S. relationships with this area include President Carter's decision on February 24 to terminate military assistance to Ethiopia and the expulsion on April 26 of the American military and consular presence by the Ethiopian government. While the President has evidently chosen to pursue a "moralistic" policy in the area, an alternative approach would include a careful examination of the pragmatic interests of the U.S. in the Horn of Africa and a

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policy designed to defend these interests. Without a knowledge of the recent history of the Horn nations and of their prospects for the near future, an intelligent policy cannot be designed.

ETHIOPIA: INTERNAL HISTORY

Under the long rule of the Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), Ethiopia was the strongest U.S. ally in Africa. However, on September 12, 1974, the Emperor was overthrown by a military coup. The government which then came to power was the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) or, as it has come to be called "The Dergue" (Junta). Originally, the Dergue consisted of 120 military officers, led by its chairman, Lt. General Aman Michael Andom. Soon after the coup, however, the Dergue itself was purged, and sixty members, including General Andom, were executed in November 1974. Thereafter, leadership fell upon three officers: the New Chairman, Brig. General Teferi Bante; the First Deputy Chairman, Major Mengistu Haile Mariam; and the Second Deputy Chairman, Lt. Colonel Atnafu Abate. These three soon fell in to rivalry that ended on February 3, 1977, when Bante and Mengistu engaged in a gunfight at the secret headquarters of the Dergue. Bante and six of his aides were killed. Colonel Abate was not present and so escaped, but since that date, Colonel Mengistu, who was trained in the United States, has been the de facto head of state.

From the very beginning of its rule, the Dergue has adopted a strong left-wing course. In the first six months of its regime, all land and the major banks and industries were nationalized and the feudal relationships between landlord and tenant abolished. The Dergue also created the "Ethiopian National Democratic Revolutionary Program", providing for a "transition to socialism." This program includes the establishment of peasants' organizations and tenants' committees to carry through land reforms and punish "exploiters". These institutions have the power to impose sentences of fifteen days' hard labor and three months' imprisonment against those convicted of exploitation, and there is no appeal from their verdicts. The universities have also been closed, and the press and radio so heavily infused with Marxist jargon that the regime issued a special dictionary to help the populace understand it.

These reforms have amounted to a social revolution in Ethiopia. Not only has the means of production been nationalized, but

also power has essentially been rapidly transferred from the once-powerful Amhara tribe of the northern parts of Ethiopia to the Galla tribe of the south. The Amharas have traditionally been landowners, and the Gallas shepherds, warriors, and nomads.

RESISTANCE

Internally, the rule of the Dergue has met with armed resistance, partly because of the massive resentment at its reforms and its brutal regime and partly because it has failed to stabilize its power and defeat its enemies. This resistance has become intense. Of the fourteen provinces of Ethiopia, seven now have guerilla insurgency movements. The most significant of these resistance movements has centered on the northeast province of Eritrea, which comprises 10 percent of the land area of Ethiopia and includes its entire 540-mile seacoast on the Red Sea.

If the Dergue were to recognize the independence of Eritrea, as the rebels demand, the country would become landlocked. Eritrea was ruled by Italy from 1885 to 1941, when the British occupied it. In 1952, it became part of Ethiopia and in 1962, a formal part of the Ethiopian empire. In 1961, however, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was formed. The ELF originally had a strong Marxist orientation, but has apparently moved toward a Moslem position. It was not active until 1965 and the rebellion did not become serious until 1971. The rebellion was originally a Moslem movement against the Christian government of the Emperor, but more recently it has involved ideological and social conflicts. A splinter group from the ELF is the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), probably more Marxist than the ELF but smaller with 12-15,000 men in the field to the ELF's 22-25,000. Still another group is the Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Forces, a splinter from the EPLF led by Osman Saleh Sabe, with 2500-3000 troops but with considerable financial support from Arab sources. All rebel forces deny that they are officially Marxist, and all probably contain diverse elements. But the leadership of both the ELF and the EPLF is Marxist. The EPLF in particular has relied on Soviet arms - the Kalashnikov automatic rifle and Soviet anti-aircraft weaponry - though the guerillas increasingly make use of American arms captured from Ethiopian regulars. The Eritreans also receive some moral and financial support from Arab states, especially Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Sudan, though they sympathize with Eritrean aims, have provided only small support and have urged unity and negotiation with the Dergue. Only Sabe of the new splinter group receives substantial financial aid from the Arab states. The EPLF has accused him of having embezzled \$20 million from these funds.

Despite their disunity, the Eritrean rebels have made considerable progress in their war. On March 22, 1977, the forces of the EPLF captured Nakfa, the capital of the northern Sahel district of Eritrea. Earlier they captured Edd on the Red Sea and Tesseni on the Sudanese border; later they took Afabet and, thus, cleared the entire district of Ethiopian troops. The siege of Nakfa remains their most impressive military achievement. It lasted six months and included two parachute drops and an action designed to open a road involving 5,400 men and armor support. The Eritreans have the advantage of the Ethiopians in manpower - unusual in guerilla warfare - but the Ethiopians control the air with American F-86 fighters, C-119 transports, and F-5E ground support jets.

Given this success, it is not surprising that the Eritreans refuse to compromise with the Dergue. Recent Soviet and Cuban pressures to unify the separatist movement and to negotiate with the Dergue were rejected though the ELF and the EPLF did agree on May 31 to form a National Democratic Front.

The Dergue has embarked on a determined effort to crush the Eritrean rebellion. It is currently trying to raise a peasant army of 50-200,000 men and Mengistu has sought Soviet military aid. In late April, the Dergue began a reign of terror. According to the Ethiopian Herald, 971 "counter-revolutionaries" were "liquidated" in Gondar province in the north. Diplomats in Addis Ababa later reported that 500 students and young people were killed in the capital by government forces, which then charged money to the victims' families for return of the bodies.

Eritrea is not the only revolting province. Among the others that are in rebellion is the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA), strong in the urban areas, extreme Marxist in orientation, and popular among academicians. In the southern desert province of Ogaden, Somalia supports another insurgency movement, the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF). However, outside of Eritrea, the most serious insurgencies have developed in the northern provinces of Begemdir and Tigre. In the former, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) fielded a force of 4,000 men in 1976 and is largely traditionalist and non-Marxist. Its members tend to be supporters of Haile Selassie. It was against the EDU's strength in Gondar that the purges of late April were directed. In June, the government recaptured Humera and Metemma in Gondar from the EDU. In Tigre, the Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) is pro-Marxist.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS WITH THE SUPERPOWERS

Externally, Ethiopia has moved away from the United States and much closer to the Communist bloc. Between 1945 and 1975, the U.S. gave \$618 million in military and economic aid to Ethiopia and was virtually the only source of arms. In 1953, the two countries signed a mutual defense pact. However, since the anti-imperial coup, relations have been strained. In July, 1976, three officers of the Dergue were executed on charges of spying for the CIA. Nevertheless, in 1976, the Dergue purchased over \$150 million worth of military equipment from the U.S. including the M-60 tank, the F-5E fighter, long-range artillery, and a radar complex. U. S. aid to Ethiopia was slow, and on February 24, 1977, the Carter Administration suspended all military aid to Ethiopia on the grounds that the government was violating human rights.

The Dergue has, from the beginning, pursued a policy of re-alignment. Its members have almost all been leftists and Marxists of various ideological persuasions, and the body has described its reforms as "scientific socialism." Though ideologically the Dergue has been associated with Maoist doctrines, its actual policy has increasingly turned to the Soviet Union. In December 1976, a military delegation from Ethiopia went to Moscow and obtained a secret agreement for the purchase of over \$100 million in arms. On May 4, 1976, Colonel Mengistu himself made an official visit to the Soviet Union and held talks with President Podgorny and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Mengistu obtained a \$300 million arms agreement. A report of the arrival in Ethiopia in May of 20-40 T-34 Soviet tanks, an equal number of armored personnel carriers, and artillery and light arms from the USSR was confirmed, and 80 T-54 tanks were reported delivered in June.

On April 23, the Ethiopian government expelled the consulates of six countries - those of the U.S., Sudan, Italy, France, Belgium, and Great Britain. Also included in the expulsion were about 100 civilian and military personnel and their 250 dependents of five other U.S. organizations. These organizations were the U.S. cultural center in Addis Ababa, with six officers; the Kagnev Radio Communications Station and the Consulate in Asmara (in Eritrea), with 45 persons; the Naval Medical Research Unit in Addis Ababa with twenty persons; and the Military Assistance Advisory Group, with 46 persons, also in Addis Ababa. For two months prior to the expulsion,

Ethiopian radio had conducted open attacks on the U.S., the CIA, and on U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, whom it accused of "looking for ways and means of reversing the Ethiopian revolution." Mengistu, since the expulsion, has sought military and economic aid from the USSR as well as from Yugoslavia, Cuba, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Libya, and Viet Nam. Fidel Castro visited Ethiopia in April and later hailed the Ethiopian revolution as Africa's first truly Marxist revolution, and Cuba later announced that it was sending "military advisors" to Ethiopia. At the present time, there are believed to be about fifty Cuban advisers in the country, though larger numbers have also been reported. A military-civilian delegation recently returned to Ethiopia from Viet Nam where, reportedly at the suggestion of the Soviets, it sought American arms captured at the fall of Saigon. Since about 80 percent of the Ethiopian armed forces' military equipment is at present supplied by the U.S., the government must obtain a supply of spare parts and replacements if its present arsenal is to remain useful.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS WITH ADJACENT STATES

The 1974 coup in Ethiopia, and the rebellion and changes in foreign policy which it entailed, is the main reason for the destabilization and uncertainty that now pertain in the Horn of Africa. Aside from the relationship with the U.S. and the USSR, Ethiopian foreign policy has also been affected in its relationship with Somalia and Sudan. As indicated above, both countries support, at least tacitly, insurgency movements in Ethiopia, and Somalia has claims to Ethiopian territory.

SUDAN

Sudan has become generally pro-Western under the leadership of General Mohammed al-Nimeiry, who seized power in 1969. Though al-Nimeiry originally moved close to the Soviets, Communist officers in the army sought to assassinate him in 1971. He quelled the rebellion and crushed the Sudanese Communist party. Since 1973, he has moved closer to the U.S. in the wake of Egypt's similar moves. Relations with Ethiopia have deteriorated since the Dergue's coup, and al-Nimeiry believes Ethiopia aided the brief Libyan invasion of Sudan in July 1976, when a dissident right-wing Moslem sect, the Ansars, rebelled in Khartoum. About 5,000 Ansars are now in Ethiopian refugee camps, and there are said to be 150,000 Eritrean fugitives in Sudan. Al-Nimeiry has recently expelled about 90 Soviet advisors after Ethiopia expelled the Americans, and he has charged that there are 2,500 Cuban advisors in Ethiopia. Since last summer, Sudan has increased its aid to the Eritreans.

SOMALIA

The major conflict in the Horn is that between Somalia and Ethiopia. Somalia, under the leadership of Muhammed Siad Barre, has claims to the Ogaden province in Ethiopia, and has supported insurgents there. It also has a claim to Djibouti, the former French colony of Afars and Issas.

Just as Ethiopia has been dependent on U.S. arms supplies, so Somalia has been dependent on the Soviet Union since 1963, when the USSR became the sole supplier of arms to Somalia. With an army of 25,000 men and a 1974 military budget of \$15 million, the Somali armed forces have 200 T-34 tanks, 50 T-54/55 medium tanks, 60 BTR-40 and 250 BTR-152 armored personnel carriers. Its artillery includes over 100 76mm. cannon, 80 gun-howitzers of 122mm. which can fire 22 kg. shells at a range of 21,900 meters. It also has about 150 anti-aircraft guns of calibers up to 100mm. The Somali air force consists of about 66 planes: 10 Soviet Ilyushin-28's in a light bomber squadron, 12 MIG-21's in a fighter squadron, and 2 fighter/ground attack squadrons with 44 MIG-17's and MIG-15's. There are 4,000 Soviet advisors in Somalia and the head of UN operations in the country is also a Soviet, identified by Western intelligence as a member of the KGB. Siad Barre's own internal security forces are dominated by the KGB, which uses them to spy on foreign missions.

In return for this aid, the USSR has made intensive use of Somalia for its military presence in the Indian Ocean. On June 10, 1975, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and revealed aerial photographs of a large Soviet complex at Berbera on the Indian Ocean coast of Somalia. The complex included a cruise missile facility. Both Somalia and the Soviet Union denied this and some political opponents of Schlesinger suggested that the Department of Defense had fabricated the photographs. However, in July 1975, a delegation of senators led by Dewey Bartlett of Oklahoma visited Berbera and confirmed Schlesinger's testimony. They estimated that there were 500-1500 Soviet personnel in Berbera. The Soviets also make use of similar facilities at Kismayu on the Somali coast. Fidel Castro also visited Somalia on his recent tour of Africa, but his attempt to mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia was not successful. Siad Barre claims that all Cuban advisors in Somalia have now left.

DJIBOUTI

The principal conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia centers on the Republic of Djibouti. On June 27, 1977, this country gained its independence from France. As the Territory of the Afars and the Issas, it had been the last European colony in Africa. Though Ethiopia has no real claim to the area, the only linkage between Addis Ababa and the sea is through the railroad that connects the Ethiopian capital to the port of Djibouti, which carries about 80 percent of Ethiopia's foreign trade. The security of the port is thus of the utmost importance to Ethiopia. In late June, the railroad link was at least temporarily disrupted when Somali-supported guerrillas (WSLF) blew it up. The Republic of Djibouti is an almost unbelievably poor country. It is reported to have 90 percent unemployment, 90 percent illiteracy, no natural resources, and only three college graduates in the entire country. Of the two major tribes, the larger is the Issas, which make up 75 percent of the population and who are Somali-speaking. (Somalian claims to the country are based on this fact.) The smaller tribe, the Afars, were favored by the French and are at present the dominant force. However, the first President of the Republic is Hassan Gouled Aptidon, an Issa, who leads the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Somali Coast. This development could increase the likelihood of war between Somalia and Ethiopia for control of Djibouti, though France has increased its military forces there by 50 percent to prevent such a contingency.

Conflict within the Horn of Africa thus appears to be profound and chronic and affects both the internal stability of the regional nations and their external relationships. War is by no means unlikely in the near future. In the last week of June, charges of invasions and counter-invasions in the area were exchanged by representatives of the Horn nations at the meetings of the Organization of African Unity in Libreville.

INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

International war in the Horn of Africa could have repercussions far beyond the poor and unimportant nations of the area. Three areas that could be affected by such a war are the following:

- (1) Central Africa: Sudan has a precariously hostile relationship to Chad and to Libya. Kenya has been at odds with Somalia, which has claims to Kenyan as well as to

Ethiopian territory. Kenya also has been increasingly hostile to Uganda under the rule of Idi Amin, and it will be recalled that it was from Nairobi that Israeli commandos launched their now famous raid on Entebbe airport in July 1976. A war between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan, or between any two of the three could easily explode into a general conflagration of north central Africa and lead to major changes in the power balance there.

(2) The Mideast: Since the occupation of the Sinai by Israel in 1973, the Israelis have had secure access to the Red Sea through the port of Aqaba on the Gulf of Aqaba. But, the passage through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean is controlled by the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, which can be choked off at Djibouti. The Israeli commercial trading firm, Zim, provides about 30 percent of the port's traffic. Since the cutting of the railroad between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, Israeli ships have used the Ethiopian port of Assaba on the Eritrean coast. Across the Bab el Mandeb is the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, also under heavy Soviet influence and also a threat to Israeli access to the Indian Ocean. The PDR Yemen has relied on Soviet military aid, including aircraft and tanks, and there are 3000-4000 Cubans there. A bloc of moderate Arab states - Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and North Yemen - have sought to woo Somalia from its Soviet posture, collaborating with Kuwait and the United Arab territories, and the Saudis have exerted similar pressure on the PDR Yemen through an aid program of \$400 million.

(3) The Indian Ocean: Because of the increasing focus of the U.S. - USSR rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and because the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa represent one of the major points of entry to the Ocean, the conflicts in the Horn connect with world politics on a grand scale. Instability in this region presents an uncertainty for the world's major powers that is intolerable, and its importance to the colonial powers of the past underlines its continued importance today. Great Britain, France, and Italy all had colonies in the Horn in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But if instability is intolerable, so also would be domination of the Horn by a single contemporary power bloc. The route from the Persian Gulf around the Arabian peninsula and up the Red Sea to Suez is the easiest route of access for Mideast oil to reach Europe and the U.S., which respectively import 60 percent and 30 percent of their oil from the Persian Gulf. The dominance of the Horn by the Soviets or their allies - and at the present time they virtually do dominate it - would allow them to interdict Western oil supplies and conceivably hold Europe and the United States to ransom.

ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

The current crisis in the Horn of Africa is largely the product of the Ethiopian regime's reversal of alliances, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union. To some extent this reversal presents a dilemma for the Soviets. Not only are they now supplying arms to Somalia and the Eritrean rebels but also to the Ethiopians. Previously, the Soviet policy had been based on the adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Now, with the Dergue seeking and obtaining friendship from the Soviets, how can they continue to supply Somalia and Eritrea, still the enemies of Ethiopia? This dilemma the Soviets tried to resolve in May 1977, with a mediated settlement of the Eritrean dispute, but they failed to do so. In the future, the Soviets may be able to contain or settle the conflicts in the Horn, or these conflicts may erupt into larger conflicts that would undermine Soviet influence.

So far, the Carter Administration has, in the eyes of both Ethiopia and Somalia, failed to construct an adequate policy. As pointed out above, Ethiopian radio has denounced the U.S. and Andrew Young, and the Dergue has been distrustful of Carter's "human rights" rhetoric. Somalian President Siad Barre has also criticized Ambassador Young in a recent interview:

I met Andrew Young in Zanzibar recently, but there was no substance, only superficial generalities. So I don't understand what President Carter means. (NEWSWEEK, June 27, 1977, p. 46.)

It may not be an unfair assessment to say that all the leaders of the Horn are men of power who have assumed and held leadership through violence, and who must continue to do so as long as their internal rivals threaten them with violent overthrow. It is, therefore, unrealistic to believe that a "moralistic" policy based on the assertion of vaguely defined "human rights" would impress them or that terminating relations with them would contribute to whatever substance the notion of human rights might have. It is more likely that at least some commonly accepted standards of civility would be observed in this region if the U.S. used its influence to stabilize and balance current conflicts of power.

One alternative policy for the U.S. might, therefore, be to accept the Ethiopian reversal of alliances as a Fait Accompli and seek to promote anti-Marxist elements, Christian or Moslem, in the Eritrean rebellion. This option, which could consist in covert military support, could counter Soviet support of pro-Marxist factions and forestall a Soviet domination of

Eritrea while continuing to destabilize their new ally, Ethiopia. At the same time, the U.S. might align more closely with both Kenya and the moderate Arab bloc in the Mideast to establish (a) a balance of power in north central Africa, (b) the security of the Red Sea for both Israeli and Western shipping, and (c) an increased presence in the Indian Ocean. The latter two objectives could be achieved through the construction of a naval base on the Sudanese coast (or on the coast of an independent Eritrea) and a base at the Kenyan port of Mombasa on the Indian Ocean.

An alliance between Sudan, Kenya, and the U.S. would probably be very feasible, since both countries now feel themselves to be isolated and threatened by the Soviet's aid to their neighboring enemies and since they have mutual interests in an alliance. Kenyan Foreign Minister Munya Waiyaki has recently emphasized the harmonious relationship of the two countries and their common dread of Soviet interference. Sudan and Kenya have recently concluded an agreement to construct a 600-mile road that would connect Sudan to Mombasa. Trade between the two countries has increased substantially in recent years and will probably increase further if Sudanese agriculture in the south develops as expected and as Arab money is invested in both Sudan and Kenya.

Certain problems with such an alliance exist, however. First, though Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta has traditionally been pro-American, he is 81 years old and will probably die in the near future, and his death may destabilize Kenya and promote a reversal of alliances and internal trends. Under Kenyatta, the government has remained almost entirely in the hands of his dominant Kikuyu tribe and opposition leaders such as Tom Mboye, a Luo, and others since then have been rather mysteriously killed. Wealth in Kenya has tended to concentrate in the hands of government officials and this has bred resentment among the out-groups in Kenya. The Soviets, the Somalis, and Kenyatta's own domestic rivals would probably favor a major reversal of internal and external policies and work to encourage it.

Secondly, unless the U.S. takes the initiative in the near future, the Arab moderates could construct their own power bloc independently of the U.S. and exclude or come to threaten American or Western interests. In early June for example, al-Nimeiry traveled to Peking to seek Chinese support against the Soviets. Thirdly, the continuance of the Arab-Israeli split continues to divide the U.S., and the developing Arab power bloc, and some accommodation on this issue must be reached if an enduring relationship is to be constructed.

CONCLUSION

The recent history of the political conflicts in the Horn of Africa shows a strong trend toward alignment with the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. The strategic importance of the area makes it valuable (in some ways, indispensable) to Western interests and to the Soviets. But the West has suffered only reverses in this area. Paralleling the expulsion of the U.S. from Ethiopia on April 26, are the expulsions of an American naval base in Bahrain, the only base the U.S. had in the Persian Gulf, in mid-May and a coup in the Seychelles on June 5 that moved these strategically located islands much closer to the Soviets. These reverses seriously jeopardize U.S. strength in the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa. As the West has withdrawn or been expelled, the Soviets have gained strength in these nations, but the U.S. has not yet designed a viable or realistic policy toward the region. Until it does so, despite the dilemmas of Soviet policy and local resentment and fear of their presence, the Communist penetration and manipulation of the Horn of Africa will probably continue.

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