

## SOVIET-CUBAN INTERVENTION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: Impact and Lessons

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Developments in the Horn of Africa since the crisis of 1977-78 have stimulated a great deal of debate regarding Soviet intentions in the African continent and elsewhere.\* Concern has been growing among U.S. policymakers that the Soviet ventures in Angola, Ethiopia, and lately Afghanistan may be setting a pattern for future involvements in other strategic areas of the Third World such as the Persian Gulf, Central America, and the Caribbean.

These developments, as they have affected East-West competition in the Horn, have been somewhat ironic. Somalia, which from the early 1970s until 1977 furnished naval and air facilities to the Soviets, was viewed as a staunch "Marxist" ally of the USSR. The Somali army was equipped entirely by the Soviets and trained by Soviet and Cuban advisors. In contrast, Ethiopia was regarded as a pro-Western country; the United States had maintained military communications facilities (whose importance has declined with improved satellite communications) at Asmara, and at the same time had trained and equipped the armed forces of that country. With the advent of Soviet and Cuban "fraternal aid" to Ethiopia in 1977-78 the situation was reversed: in Ethiopia,

Cuban and Soviet advisors replaced the Americans, while Somalia, in the meantime, has sought alliance with the United States. The process of realignment in the Horn was completed in 1980, and, irony of ironies in the superpower rivalry, the United States may soon be using Soviet-built naval and air facilities at Berbera.

A brief analysis of the main factors in this process, as they elucidate Soviet policy in the area, is useful in trying to discern future trends in the region. The Soviets were initially hesitant to intervene militarily in the Horn; the decision-making process was a slow one, as the factors involved were complex. But what ultimately determined Soviet actions was the perception that they had been betrayed by a hitherto reliable friend, Somalia. Decisions on the future course of Soviet involvement in the Horn will undoubtedly

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be difficult as well, for the Soviet strategic foothold in Africa is not invulnerable, at the same time that the USSR will have to deal with a more complicated international situation and a U.S. now perhaps more willing to defend its interests abroad.

#### **The Nature of the Conflict**

It would be misleading to blame the Soviets for all the troubles in the Horn. The major cause of conflict there, as elsewhere in the Third World, has been the dramatic awakening of the people from their colonial pasts. The conflict in the Horn is not new, nor is it only of one dimension.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the political factors involved, there have been historical, geographical, ethnic-cultural and economic factors.

time following World War II. The boundaries drawn up by the Italians, British, and Ethiopians at various times during these wars were arrived at arbitrarily, without recourse to geography and ethnicity, and have never been accepted by the Somalis as legitimate. Ethiopia and Somalia engaged in another brief border war in 1964. Thus current fighting in the Ogaden can be viewed as a new campaign in a very old war.

The province of Eritrea has been the second major source of conflict in the Horn. Like the dispute over the Ogaden, this conflict dates back to the Italian colonial empire of the late 19th century, when the Italians artificially established the Eritrean province as a Red Sea colony. After World War II Eritrea became a U.N. trust territory and only in 1962 did it become an integral part of