

# Soviet involvement in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1947-1991



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Trinity Term, April 2012

Supervised by

Prof. David M. Anderson and Dr Alex Pravda

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## **Abstract**

Soviet-Third World relations during the Cold War are still not clearly understood. Largely based on previously unused primary material, this study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by emphasising the interplay between domestic, local, regional, and global dimensions in analysing Moscow's involvement in the Horn of Africa. By offering a detailed examination of Soviet involvement in Somalia and Ethiopia during the Cold War, this thesis aims to shed light on the factors, shaping Moscow's policies in the area. While it does not lay any claim of representativeness for other Third World regions, this thesis aims to highlight the intricate interplay between ideology and *realpolitik* in the making of Soviet foreign policy. Additionally, it tries to determine to what extent the 'local pull,' exerted by both Addis Ababa and Mogadishu, as well as by Soviet and other Bloc diplomats, informed the Kremlin's policy in the area.

This thesis shows that the two main strands of Moscow's foreign policy, the pragmatic statist line and the ideological Cominternist approach, were not in conflict with one another. Instead, they were amalgamated into a flexible tactical approach, designed to maximise Soviet influence by whatever means available, along the path of least resistance. Another strand in the argument is interwoven with the pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War. While accepting recent interpretations of superpower-Third World relations, this research develops a more nuanced account of the centre-periphery interaction. The act of local engagement was Moscow's initiative, in accord with its wider geo-political plans. Once engaged, the local actors proved instrumental in informing the Kremlin's exercise of maintaining a presence. As with its entry, Moscow's disengagement was predicated on strategic considerations. The period of *perestroika*, assigned the Third World lower priority in the Kremlin's global agenda, engendering a withdrawal from the Horn.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to bridge the gap in understanding of Soviet-Third World policy by emphasising the linkage between domestic, local, regional and global dimensions in Moscow's engagement in Ethiopia and Somalia during the Cold War. In general, it seeks to cast light on the factors that shaped Moscow's policies in the Horn of Africa. While this study will not make any claims of representativeness for other Third World areas, it will help to underscore the complex relationship between ideology and *realpolitik* in the making of Soviet foreign policy. Last, but not least, this thesis might throw useful light on the interaction between domestic groups and interests forming policy in Moscow; the local Horn; regional, Middle Eastern and North East-African; and global, Cold War, developments that motivated the Kremlin's interest. This study will attempt to determine the extent to which the local actors, understood by this thesis as both Ethiopia's and Somalia's leaders, as well as Moscow's and its allies' representatives, informed the Kremlin's policy in the area.

This thesis offers an analytical account of Soviet foreign policy towards the Horn from the entry into Ethiopia in 1947 to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. In outlining the factors that shaped Moscow's policies in the Horn, this thesis integrates the story of Soviet

involvement in Ethiopia and Somalia with broader trends in international history, particularly with regard to the recent emphasis on ‘decentralising’ and ‘globalising’ the Cold War narrative. By constructing successive narratives of Moscow’s responses to critical events in the local setting, this thesis will offer an analysis, which illuminates the interplay between geopolitics and ideology, using a pericentric interpretative framework for the study of Soviet activism in the Third World during the Cold War.

While this study is based primarily on original sources, it acknowledges the value of the voluminous literature on the Soviet-Third World relations and debates on the interaction between the metropolises and the periphery throughout the Cold War. This thesis aims to construct a multipolar diplomatic history of Soviet involvement in the Horn as told by representatives of a wide array of actors, ranging from Washington to Moscow, and through London, Berlin, Prague, Belgrade, and Sofia. Accordingly, it places the events in the Horn within a wider international context in an effort to attain a better understanding of the global tides of historical change, not only in the metropolises, but also at the periphery.

This thesis argues against the conventional notion that Moscow pursued an active strategy of expansion in countering Western influence in the Third World. On the contrary, it attempts to show that, in the case of the Horn, Moscow did not become involved in the Ethiopian-Somali conflict for the sake of global ambitions. In contrast to previous interpretations, the research will claim that while the Soviet Union attempted to embed a presence in both Somalia and Ethiopia as part of the general low risk priority given to the area, it, in fact, promoted stability for as long as it helped reinforce its local standing at America’s loss. The Kremlin perceived the escalation of neighbourly tensions as damaging to its high-priority international interests.

This thesis shows that Soviet activism in the area combined elements of both aggressive opportunism in establishing a local presence and prudence in maintaining it. In the Horn, the two main strands of Moscow’s foreign policy, the pragmatic statist line and the

ideologically-laden Cominternist approach, were not in conflict with one another. Instead, these strands were amalgamated into a flexible tactical approach, designed to maximise influence by whatever means available – ideological, military, diplomatic - along the path of least resistance. Soviet tactics attempted to accommodate various institutional interests and foreign policy approaches. Different actors in Moscow, such as the military and the military-minded members of the Politburo, had activist preferences, whereas the Foreign Ministry was more pragmatically-oriented.

This thesis will show that the Kremlin's incremental and flexible behaviour showed more pro-activeness towards those local developments that were seen to affect high-priority international issues concerning the strategic balance of power or relations with the United States. Where events of local significance, such as regime changes were concerned, Moscow tended to adopt a responsive, rather than proactive policy stance. This pattern was further strengthened by the local role of Moscow's and the East-European allies. In their day-to-day activities on the ground, the Bloc states were able to freelance in furthering the common objectives, but when the local environment became more complex, Moscow assumed its commanding role in order to maximise the result of their combined effort and avoid losses in its local standing and prestige. We argue that Moscow's East-European allies acted accordingly in advancing Moscow's endeavours by close communication and coordination between them. Moscow needed the support of its Bloc allies as it had to keep a low profile in Ethiopia and Somalia in an attempt not to aggravate the local regimes and the American presence.

Another strand in this thesis' argument is interwoven with the pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War. It will seek to provide a nuanced treatment of the relationship between the centre and the periphery. The thesis demonstrates that both US and Soviet initial engagement was linked to their wider geopolitical concerns. Once the Kremlin engaged in the area, however, the complexity of the local environment and the role of the local actors, such as

Moscow's diplomatic envoys, their Bloc's associates, intelligence networks, and the local strong men, proved important in helping Moscow's leaders perceive the local developments through the prism of their international, strategic thinking, justifying the exercise of maintaining a presence. Just as with the entry, the withdrawal in the early-1990s was predicated on strategic, rather than tactical considerations. The period of radical socio-political reformation of the Soviet system assigned lower priority to regional strife on the international agenda; this facilitated Moscow's withdrawal from local hotbeds of tension.

This study offers a detailed examination of the Soviet involvement in Somalia and Ethiopia in six chronological chapters, spanning the Cold War era. They construct a sequential narrative of Moscow's responses to critical events in the broader Cold War context, as well as the narrower North-East African/Middle Eastern region, and the local Ethiopian-Somali setting. Special attention will be paid to the interaction between the ideological and the statist approaches in Soviet foreign policy. Last but not least, the role played by Soviet East-European allies will form an important element in the historical narrative.

The first two chapters show that the Kremlin's entry and its hedging policy in the Horn was motivated by American interest in the region, changes in the global setting, as well as on the Soviet domestic scene. The increased international significance acquired by the newly-independent states following the Bandung conference in 1955, clearly played a pivotal role in modifying not only Moscow's, but also Washington's interest in the Third World. Changes in the Soviet leadership also played an important role. While Stalin had already begun to seek ways in which to amplify Moscow's influence in the former colonies, Khrushchev turned this change of thinking into action. A local initiative, launched in response to Kremlin's previous advances, allowed Moscow to improve its presence in the Horn. From the outset, Haile Selassie launched a strategy to improve relations with the East, while being simultaneously courted by the West. This offered Moscow an opportunity to improve its standing in Ethiopia.

An additional opening for the Kremlin was provided by UN-sanctioned Somali independence in 1960. While it touched off a protracted period of local strife by exacerbating Somali territorial claims, it enabled Moscow's military to find fertile ground for extending the Soviet presence in the region. This exuberant approach, however, was countered by Khrushchev's sober assessment of the feasibility of African socialism after failures of socialist experiments in Western Africa and Lumumba's ouster. The Soviet leader's rather flexible approach underlined the dual nature of Soviet foreign policy, balancing between cautious diplomacy and revolution. While getting involved in Mogadishu, Moscow, aided by its East-European allies, launched careful propaganda efforts in Addis Ababa. As chapter two shows, the relatively stable local environment in the 1960s emphasised the competitive behaviour of the two superpowers.

Chapter three shows that towards the late-1960s, the wider Horn, including Sudan, witnessed sweeping political shifts as leftist military regimes seized power in Mogadishu and Khartoum. These developments seemingly occurred without Moscow's active encouragement. They ran almost in parallel with a gradual reduction in the Kremlin's influence in the adjacent Middle East region. During this period, the Soviet military-strategic complex played a pivotal role in informing Kremlin's Horn policies by emphasising the increased value of the Indian Ocean for superpower competition. These years saw the departure of the British from Aden and the US plans to launch a base on the Diego Garcia archipelago. Somalia therefore came to occupy a central role in the Soviet navy's regional designs, given its proximity to strategic ship lanes in the Northwestern corner of the Indian Ocean.

In the first half of 1970s, Moscow's involvement in the Horn, therefore, changed from a low-key exercise into a more open engagement, exemplified by expansive projects of military infrastructure along the Somali coast, aimed at serving Moscow's regional aims, instead of enhancing Mogadishu's ambitions. Nevertheless, the pursuit of Soviet geostrategic objectives in Mogadishu met strong Somalis opposition. At the same time, the Kremlin applied

a combination of technical and legal measures, aimed at restraining Somalia's expansionist ambitions. Mindful of the hazardous nature of the local situation, Moscow ably maintained its position in the country by adhering to incrementalist policies and taking a flexible approach.

While the Soviet Union got more deeply involved in Somalia, vast socio-political changes in Ethiopia gathered speed and modified the Kremlin's local outlook. As chapter four demonstrates, Moscow, guided by its diplomatic representatives, who proved invaluable in obtaining and sharing intelligence on the ground, was initially in favour of engaging cautiously by closely monitoring the situation. Moscow appeared not to be ready to extend the support requested by Addis Ababa. There was an obvious gap between local actors' demands and the priorities of the Centre. Actually, the Kremlin thought of its engagement in Ethiopia as a long-term deliberation, while Addis Ababa's new military command sought urgent solutions for the survival of the Ethiopian state. Addis Ababa demanded vast quantities of military aid, and at the time, Moscow was averse to the idea of heightening its risk taking in the Horn, taking into account the American stake in the country and the need to keep Somalia in its sphere of influence while minimising disruptive instability.

From late 1976, Moscow's attitudes toward Ethiopia changed considerably. Taking more of a Cominternist policy line, the Kremlin responded favourably to Mengistu's pleas for military assistance. However, in agreement with the flexible tactical approach, that characterised the Narkomindel strand in its policy, the Kremlin persuaded Addis Ababa to abstain from entering Somalia during the Ogaden war. Furthermore, external factors, such as the increased involvement of other Soviet-allies, most notably Cuba, and Western actors, such as the US, played an important role in shaping changes in Soviet attitudes towards the Horn from the early-to-mid 1977. Following their recognition of the progressive persuasion of Mengistu's left wing military faction, Moscow's leaders, in close consultation with their diplomatic representatives, who took a positive view of Ethiopia's revolutionary potential, decided gradually to increase their political support for the new regime.

Aggressive Somali attacks on Ethiopia in the summer, presumably indirectly instigated by Washington's regional allies – Saudi Arabia – required an immediate adjustment in Moscow's diplomatic approach. While in the spring, Kremlin relied on the power of diplomacy, towards the autumn it opted for a diplomacy of power. Moscow chose to toughen its stance towards Siad, whose aggressive actions severely threatened the Ethiopian revolution and so played into the hands of Moscow's international opponents. However, after initially supporting a remarkable military operation against the Somalis, Moscow's civilian leadership reverted to its Narkomindel approach and sought to counter the ambitions of the Soviet military who contemplated taking the fight into Somalia in the spring of 1978. The Kremlin dismissed this idea, fearing that a Soviet-backed Ethiopian entry into Somalia would be seen by the Western countries, as well as by the other African states, and by the international community, as against the spirit of Moscow's overall involvement which the Soviet leadership wanted to appear as supportive of local stability. The Kremlin expected its moves to spur widespread international concern, and to further complicate Soviet-American relations.

The analysis of Moscow's road to withdrawal from the Horn showed that the Gorbachev's transformation led to a gradual normalisation of the relationship between Washington and Moscow. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was followed by similar actions in other parts of the world. Still, in the Horn the superpowers' endeavour to help settle Ethiopia's disputes with Somalia and Eritrea faced serious resistance from Addis Ababa. While Moscow had fulfilled its previous obligations to Mengistu's regime, the late-1980s saw the Kremlin resolved to cease all military deliveries. American rapprochement with Mengistu's opposition forces and Moscow's reluctance to provide additional military assistance to the regime led to the Derg's collapse. Siad Barre suffered a similar fate. He had to flee Somalia after losing his power base. The last chapter of the thesis, therefore, aims to provide a further insight into the manner in which superpower antagonism equipped the small states with a key instrument they used to 'pull' Moscow and Washington. However, the period

of significant socio-political transformation of the Soviet system in the mid-1980s drastically lowered the periphery's significance for superpowers' international agenda, precipitating the Kremlin's withdrawal from local conflicts. Lastly, as we have shown, similarly to the entry and unlike the daily tactical operation on the ground, the disengagement was predicated on strategic considerations devised in the metropolis, thereby diminishing the impact of the periphery over the centre.

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## Transliteration

Romanisation of Russian –  
British standard system\*

Romanisation of Bulgarian -  
BGN/PCGN System

А а	А а	А а	А а
Б б	В в	Б б	В в
В в	У у	В в	У у
Г г	Г г	Г г	Г г
Д д	Д д	Д д	Д д
Е е	Е е	Е е	Е е
Ё ё	Ё ё [e]	Ж ж	Zh zh
Ж ж	Zh zh	З з	Z z
З з	Z z	И и	I i
И и	I i	Й й	Y y
Й й	Ї ї [i]	К к	K k
К к	К к	Л л	L l
Л л	L l	М м	M m
М м	M m	Н н	N n
Н н	N n	О о	O o
О о	O o	П п	P p
П п	P p	Р р	R r
Р р	R r	С с	S s
С с	S s	Т т	T t
Т т	T t	У у	U u
У у	U u	Ф ф	F f
Ф ф	F f	Х х	Kh kh
Х х	Kh kh	Ц ц	Ts ts
Ц ц	Ts ts	Ч ч	Ch ch
Ч ч	Ch ch	Ш ш	Sh sh
Ш ш	Sh sh	Щ щ	Shch shch
Щ щ	Shch shch	Ъ ъ	Ŭ ŭ
Ъ ъ	”	Ь ь	’
Ы ы	ÿ [y]	Ю ю	Yu yu
Ь ь	’	Я я	Ya ya
Э э	É é		
Ю ю	Yu yu		
Я я	Ya ya		

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\* Simplified Romanisation is used for Russian personal names within the text as given in the parenthesis above.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABM	Antiballistic Missile
ACR	Africa Contemporary Record
CDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
AEPA	All-Ethiopian Peasant Association
APRF	Archive of the President of the Russian Federation
ARB	Africa Research Bulletin
BKP	Bŭlgarska Komunisticheska Partiya
Cab	British Cabinet Papers
CC	Central Committee
CDSP	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CWHIPB	Cold War International History Project Bulletin
Centre	The KGB Headquarters in Moscow
Comintern	Communist International
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
Derg	Council in Amharic; Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army; see PMAC below
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
EPRA	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FNLA	Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola
FO	Foreign Office
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GRU	Glavnoe Razvedyvatel'noe Upravlenie
INR	US Bureau of Intelligence and Research
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
HSIU	Haile Selassie I University
KDS	Komitet za Dŭrzhavna Sigurnost
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoï Bezopasnosti
KSČ ÚV	Komunistická strana Československa Ústřední výbor
LDCs	Less Developed Countries
MEISON	Mela Ethiopia Socialist Neqenaye
Mezhotdel	Mezhdunarodnŭi Otdel [Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoï Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza]
MFA	Movimento das Forças Armadas
MID	Ministerstvo Inostrannŭkh Del
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
MVR	Ministerstvo na Vŭtreshnite Raboti
MVnR	Ministerstvo na Vŭnshnite Raboti
NRB	Narodna Republika Bŭlgariya

Narkomindel	Narodnŷĩ Komissariat po Inostrannŷm Delam
NSC	National Security Council; National Security Court
NSS	National Security Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PGU	Pervoe Glavnoe Upravlenie
PMAG	Provisional Military Administrative Government
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council; see Derg
Politburo	Politicheskoe Byuro [TsK KPSS]
POMOA	Political Office of Mass Organisational Affairs
PRB	People's Republic of Bulgaria
PRC	Policy Review Committee; People's Republic of China
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SNB	Sbor nrodnı bezpeno ti
SRC	Supreme Revolutionary Council
StB	Sttnı Bezpenost
TASS	Telegrafnoe Agenstvo Sovetskogo Soiuzu
TFAI	Territoire Franaise des Afars et des Issas
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TsK KPSS	Tsentrnŷĩ Komitet Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuzu
UN	United Nations
UPI	United Press International
USSASFO	United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VPK	Voenno-Promyshlennŷĩ Komitet
VOKS	Vsesoyuznoe obshchestvo kul'turnoi svyazi s zagranitseı
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front
ZS-GŠ SLA	Zpravodajsk sprva Generlnıho štabu eskoslovensk lidov armdy

## Introduction

### **Superpower-Third World relations during the Cold War: Push from the centre or pull from the periphery?**

Soviet-Third World relations during the Cold War are still far from being clearly understood.<sup>1</sup> The Kremlin's pursuit of ideological and *realpolitik* objectives, in addition to its complex decision-making process, made the study of Soviet activism in Africa, before the availability of archival material in the post-Soviet period, like 'palm-reading: the lines are there, but their meaning is a matter for speculation.'<sup>2</sup> This study aims to overcome the gap in understanding of Soviet-Third World policy, by emphasising the interplay between domestic, local, regional and global dimensions in analysing Moscow's involvement in the Horn of Africa throughout the Cold War. While this thesis makes no claim that the Horn was representative of policy in other Third World regions, it might help to illuminate the complex interaction between ideology and *realpolitik* in the making of Soviet foreign policy in the developing world. Last, but not least, this thesis may throw useful light on the interaction between Moscow and the local actors, both political leaders and diplomatic representatives.

The overall task of this research will be to shed light on what factors shaped Moscow's policies in the Horn. It will attempt to seek an answer to this question by focusing on the interaction between domestic groups and interests forming policy in

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<sup>1</sup> Various accounts stress this characteristic of Soviet foreign policy; See R. Menon, *Soviet Power and the Third World* (New Haven: YUP, 1986), 21; W. Duncan and C. Ekedahl, *Moscow and the Third World under Gorbachev* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 9; W. Andersen, 'Soviets in the Indian Ocean,' *Asian Survey* 24, no. 9 (1984): 911; M. Webber, "'Out of Area" Operations,' in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds E. Bacon and Mark Sandle (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), 115; cf. J. Valenta and W. Potter, eds, *Soviet Decision-making for national Security* (Hemel Hempstead: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), and H. Brind, 'Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa,' *International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (1983/4): 76; M. Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1982), xi; 164; See also S. David, 'Realignment in the Horn,' *International Security* 4, no. 2 (1979): 77.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 64.

Moscow; local (Horn); regional, (Middle Eastern and North East-African); and global, (Cold War), developments that provoked the Kremlin's interest. This study will also seek to determine to what extent the pull, exerted by both Addis Ababa and Mogadishu, as well as by Soviet and other Bloc diplomats, informed the Kremlin's policy in the area. By answering those questions, the thesis aims to provide some insight into the understanding of Moscow's activism in other parts of Africa. Eventually, this might allow us to develop a more accurate explanation of how the Kremlin's global priorities vis-à-vis its leading international competitor – Washington – were overshadowed by its Third World involvement. Arguably, the latter led to the demise of the detente and to the outbreak of open superpower hostility in the first half of the 1980s that came to be known as the Second Cold War.

## 1. Literature Review

While this study is based primarily on original sources, it acknowledges the epistemological value of the voluminous literature on the Soviet-Third World relations and debates on the interaction between the metropolises and the periphery during the Cold War. Accordingly, this review will present some of the major strands in the analyses of Soviet foreign policy, which will provide the context for this thesis. Additionally, special attention will be paid to recent developments in the understanding of the so-called 'local pull' in superpower-Third World relations, which will provide the interpretative framework for the analysis. Lastly, this review of the literature will look into pericentric analyses of Moscow's involvement in the Third World in general, and the Horn, in particular, and will offer a more nuanced pericentric interpretation of the Soviet-Horn relations in the Cold War.

## 1.1 Soviet foreign policy

Within the study of Soviet international behaviour during the Cold War, the central question most scholars have tried to answer was ‘What guided Soviet foreign policy?’ Two diametrically opposite schools defined the sources of Soviet foreign policy conduct as justified either by ideological or *realpolitik* means, seeking to provide a better understanding of the traditional strands in the Kremlin’s foreign conduct, mixing peaceful coexistence and proletarian internationalism.<sup>3</sup> These strands followed Lenin’s views, according to which Soviet activities on the outside should run along two lines: the ideological - ‘Cominternist,’ and the statist - the ‘Narkomindel’ line. In Lenin’s thesis, these approaches should never be identical. However, when those two lines were in disagreement, it was the state line, which always prevailed.<sup>4</sup>

The Narkomindel approach, which became MID’s<sup>5</sup> responsibility, was essentially pragmatic, and based on a prior assessment of Soviet national interests.<sup>6</sup> Supporting Communist movements around the globe, the Mezhotdel<sup>7</sup> of the CPSU CC took charge of the ‘Comintern’ line.<sup>8</sup> The history of Soviet-Western relations abounds with examples

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<sup>3</sup> For details on more general trends in Soviet foreign policy see G. Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991* (London: Frank Cass, 1994); V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), see also V. Zubok and C. Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.), and J. Haslam, *Russia’s Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). On Soviet-Third World relations see I. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also A. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye* (Cambridge: HUP, 2011), G. Laron, ‘Stepping Back from the Third World Soviet Policy toward the United Arab Republic, 1965–1967,’ *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 4 (2010): 118, and J. Ferris, ‘Guns for Cotton?’ *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 5. For an insider’s account see V. Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 215, and Israelyan, *Na frontakh kholodnoi voīny: zapiski sovetskogo posla* (Moskva: Mir, 2003), 363.

<sup>4</sup> See Kornienko and Brutents, *US-Soviet Relations and Soviet Foreign Policy toward the Middle East and Africa in the 1970s*, Lysebu, 1-3 October 1994 (hereafter, Lysebu), transcr. G. A. Kvam, ed. O. A. Westad (Oslo: The Norwegian Nobel Institute, 1995), 43; 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del (MID), Russian for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereafter MFA.

<sup>6</sup> See Bessmertnykh, *The Collapse of Detente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan*, Pocantico Hills, New York 22-24 October 1992 (hereafter, Pocantico Hills), ed. and transl. S. Savranskaya, N[ational] S[ecurity] A[rchive], 113.

<sup>7</sup> Russian abbreviation for Mezhdunarodnyĭ Otdel, [International Department; hereafter, ID].

<sup>8</sup> Savranskaya, Pocantico Hills, 129.

of these two strategies competing with one another. In each case, the Soviet Union sought the benefits of agreement, without giving up propaganda, aid to national liberation movements, and other means of destabilising capitalism.<sup>9</sup> In the final analysis, the understanding of the interrelation between these two seemingly contradicting foreign policy approaches appears to be key to the analysis of the Moscow's external relations in the Third World during the Cold War.

The representatives of the 'ideological' school believed that Soviet foreign policy was motivated not only by power considerations but also crucially by communist ideology.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation saw the Cold War as inevitable, owing to the Soviet Union's constant pursuit of 'security through constant expansion,' in accord with the pre-revolutionary proverb '[T]hat which stops growing begins to rot.'<sup>11</sup> Hence the promotion of revolutionary changes abroad became institutionalised as a permanent feature of Soviet international behaviour.<sup>12</sup> There is little doubt that the Soviet foreign policy was profoundly affected by the original *Weltanschauung* (mirovozzrenie)<sup>13</sup> of Marx and Lenin. The latter's prediction that anti-imperialist developments in the colonies were to play an influential revolutionary role, defined the nature of Moscow's approaches to less developed areas, providing a significant source of regime legitimacy and international stature.<sup>14</sup> Soviet ideology was used to sanction the Kremlin's behaviour as a global

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<sup>9</sup> N. Gould-Davies, 'Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War,' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 106.

<sup>10</sup> F. Fukuyama, 'Soviet Strategy in the Third World,' in *The Soviet Union and the Third World*, 25. See also H. Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-taking and Crisis Behavior* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 319, and W. Duncan and C. Ekedahl, *Moscow and the Third World under Gorbachev* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 14-5.

<sup>11</sup> 'To chto perestaet rasti, nachinaet gnit' is generally ascribed to Catherine the Great; A. B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, 377; 408.

<sup>12</sup> T. H. von Laue, 'Soviet Diplomacy,' in *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, eds G. Craig and F. Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981 [1953]), 237.

<sup>13</sup> Worldview in German and Russian.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. Tamarin, 'Imperialist Calculations and Miscalculations in Africa,' *Kommunist*, no. 18 (1976), cited in M. Rothenberg, *The USSR and Africa* (Miami: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1980), 1; see also E. Valkenier, *The USSR and the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1983); J. Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World* (Washington: Brookings, 1986), cited in S. Neil Macfarlane, 'The Soviet

power, which assumed a right to intervene in any conflict in any part of the globe.<sup>15</sup> To this school, the issue of ideology was essential to the story of Soviet involvement in the Third World throughout the Cold War, which was aimed at gaining new ideological adherents.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in the opinion of General Anatoly Gribkov, the then First Deputy of the Chief of General Staff of the Soviet Union, ideology was present, and not only in Africa, but in all places where states assumed a socialist path of development.<sup>17</sup>

Other scholars tried to emphasise the *realpolitik* dimension in Soviet foreign policy thinking. Triska and Finley, for example, understood Soviet foreign policy as reactive in nature.<sup>18</sup> Stalin was seen as a cautious, albeit insecure, opportunist, taking advantage of tactical openings to enhance Soviet influence. He lacked any long-term strategy or even interest in spreading communism beyond the Soviet sphere of influence. Moscow's 'urge to the sea' has been another significant geopolitical claim regarding pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> The Kremlin's awareness of the destructiveness of nuclear war, which could jeopardise the existence of the Soviet Union itself, has had a dramatic effect on basic Soviet doctrine. It engendered Khrushchev's revision of the doctrine of inevitable war and his tireless advocacy of the strategy of peaceful coexistence as the safest and most reliable form of international class struggle.<sup>20</sup>

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Union and the National Liberation Movements,' in *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, ed. C. Saivetz (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 22.

<sup>15</sup> A. B. Ulam, 'Soviet Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy,' *World Politics* 11, no. 2 (1959): 156; 158. Cf. also D. Papp, *Soviet Perceptions of the Developing World in the 1980s* (Lexington: Lexington Books c1985), xi-xii. Note also V. Aspaturian, 'Soviet Foreign Policy at the Crossroads,' *International Organization* 23, no. 3 (1969): 596.

<sup>16</sup> J. Friedman, 'Soviet policy in the developing world and the Chinese challenge in the 1960s,' *Cold War History* 10, no. 2 (2010): 249ff.

<sup>17</sup> See Gribkov, *Global Competition and the Deterioration of US-Soviet Relations, 1977-80*, Harbor Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 23-26 March 1995 (hereafter, Fort Lauderdale), ed. and transl. S. Savranskaya, NSA, 59; Cf. Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 397.

<sup>18</sup> J. Triska and D. Finley, *Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> See Pursianen, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 51. Cf. J. L. Gaddis, 'The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War,' *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 3 (1983): 181.

<sup>20</sup> T. Wolfe, 'Soviet Strategic Thought in Transition,' in *Détente: Cold War Strategies in Transition*, eds E. L. Dulles and R. D. Crane (New York: Praeger, 1965), 64; Cf. M. McGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings, 1987), 36-8; 44.

More recent studies, however, suggest that Soviet Third World activism was yet another example of the complex interplay between security and ideology in Moscow's foreign policy. Moscow was motivated not only by its values and ideas but also by factors, affecting the national interests of the USSR, its power and prestige, which, according to Vladislav Zubok, were at the heart of Moscow's revolutionary-imperial paradigm.<sup>21</sup> This view posited that while Stalin successors' vision of the world was limited and distorted by Marxist-Leninist ideas, they were pragmatists bent on promoting the Soviet Union's national interests by pursuing the long-term strategic goal of strengthening the international socialist system. This goal seems to have been defensive in nature. Without increasing strength, there was evidently no backing for diplomacy, less likelihood of prestige, and a diminished prospect of significant change in the world correlation of forces.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Gaiduk's account the events during the Vietnam War illustrated the difficulties faced by Moscow as it tried to reconcile ideology with *realpolitik*, continuing the flexible, yet profoundly contradictory, foreign policy that Lenin himself advocated decades earlier.<sup>23</sup>

## 1.2 The Pericentric interpretative framework: from informal empire to the Cold War in the periphery

While interpretations of Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World provides a background for this thesis, recent studies of the centre-periphery relations during the Cold War will offer the interpretative framework for our research. American in origin, the first wave of Cold War studies and debates, led by the so-called 'orthodox' school of

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<sup>21</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 249; see also Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. Cf. S. Mazov, 'Soviet Aid to the Gizenga Government in the Former Belgian Congo (1960–61) as Reflected in Russian Archives,' *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (2007): 425.

<sup>22</sup> On this view, see F. Griffiths, 'Ideological Development and Foreign Policy,' in *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. S. Bialer (Boulder: Westview, 1981), 37, and Yu. Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance: 1959-1991* (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1996), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, x.

historians in the late 1940s to early 1950s, argued that the Cold War was caused by Stalin's hostility towards the West and his intention of advancing the cause of world communism.<sup>24</sup> However, a 'revisionist' antithesis gradually emerged in 1959.<sup>25</sup> Revisionists, or the New Left, argued that the US' thirst for overseas markets - combined, according to some, with its nuclear monopoly - forced Stalin to expand Soviet domination to Eastern Europe. In an attempt to balance both opposing currents, a third school of Cold War historical scholarship emerged in 1970s. The 'post-revisionists' were interested in seeing how developments such as the Sino-Soviet split undermined the notion of a monolithic Socialist Bloc. More nuanced and better documented than their orthodox and revisionist counterparts, post-revisionists took account of the growth of Cold War scholarship worldwide, fuelled by the opening of government papers in Western Europe.<sup>26</sup>

Since the 1990s, the opening of East European archives has revolutionised opportunities for the study of contemporary history. This was a pivotal moment in the evolution of the historiography of the Cold War international relations.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the subject of scholarly attention has moved from the United States and the Western camp to the Soviet Union and its allies. At the same time, there has been a notable shift from an emphasis on geopolitics to a stress on ideology and the role of personalities. This interpretative framework led to the initiation of different approaches to the study of the

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<sup>24</sup> See M. McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War 1941-1949* (London: Longman, 1995). Note also Hanhimaki and Westad, eds, *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), and G. Hughes and S. Dockrill, 'The Cold War as History,' in *Palgrave Advances in Cold War History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> W. A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1959) is considered a pioneer in revisionist scholarship.

<sup>26</sup> According to Hughes and Dockrill, 'The Cold War as History,' 6-7, there are three good examples of 'post-revisionist' scholarship: Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: CUP, 1972); W. LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-1990* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991); and M. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power* (Stanford: SUP, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> P. Grimsted, 'Increasing Reference Access to Post-1991 Russian Archives,' *Slavic Review* 56, no. 4 (1997): 718. The situation with archival access in Moscow remains rather complicated as minutes from Politburo and material on the KGBs foreign directorate, keeping answers to 'questions that have profound implications for east-west relations today,' remain closed; see A. Knight, 'The Fate of the KGB Archives,' *Slavic Review* 52, no. 3 (1993): 582; See also Hanhimaki and Westad, eds. *The Cold War*, xiii.

Cold War, looking more into those factors that the traditionalist interpretation of international relations rejected as unimportant, i.e. ‘the non-great powers, personality, ideology, and domestic politics.’<sup>28</sup> Pericentric interpretation demanded a fuller appreciation of the Cold War by shifting the centre of gravity away from a narrow preoccupation with the struggle between Washington and Moscow to centuries old issues on the periphery.<sup>29</sup>

Pericentric scholarship has added to the Cold War narrative the significance of the small peripheral actors to the East-West conflict, by consciously looking at nationalisms throughout the world,<sup>30</sup> giving more agency to the local actor. Building on the theme of ‘informal empire,’ developed by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in the 1950s,<sup>31</sup> which aimed to overcome traditional fixation on the metropolises, the Cold War international history focused its attention on the peripheries. In accordance with Gallagher and Robinson, it saw the real roots of superpower expansion in crises engendered in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, far from the European imperial capitals. Similarly, in Westad’s provocative thesis, the most crucial aspects of the Cold War were ‘connected to political and social developments in the Third World.’<sup>32</sup> The pericentrism,

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War* and Zubok’s *A Failed Empire*; M. Leffler, ‘Bringing it Together,’ 43. Cf. H. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall* (Princeton: PUP, 2003), 231; Cf. for example, J. Suri’s *Power and Protest*, sees greatly expanded universities as instruments of the Cold War, emphasising the transnational aspects of global discontent, while insisting on its many national causes stemming from failures of national leader’s promises for more ‘progress’ - through education, material consumption, individual equality...’ See *Power and Protest* (Cambridge: HUP, 2003), 165.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Berger, ‘The Real Cold War Was Hot,’ *Intelligence and National Security* 23, no. 1 (2008): 115. Cf. M. Beissinger, ‘Nationalism and the Collapse of Soviet Communism,’ *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 331.

<sup>30</sup> W. Kimball in L. Gardner, et al. ‘Responses to John Lewis Gaddis,’ *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 3 (1983): 199. On contemporary uses of the term ‘pericentrism,’ see also T. Smith, ‘New Bottles for New Wine,’ *Diplomatic History* 24 (2000): 567–91.

<sup>31</sup> J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade,’ *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 6, no. 1 (1953); Cf. Gallagher and Robinson, *Africa and the Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 5, and ‘The Partition of Africa,’ in *Cambridge Modern History* XI, ed. F. Hinsley (Cambridge: CUP, 1962), 639.

<sup>32</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 396.

thus, attempted to understand the Cold War by studying how it played out in the 'periphery' rather than in the 'centre.'<sup>33</sup>

Demarcated by détente diplomacy, rather than asserted by force, the instruments of imperial power were to be replaced by an informal empire of fraternal influence. Soon, the Kremlin realised that the conditions that had dictated a policy of informal imperialism made its realisation impossible.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, authors, such as Zachari Karabell, go even further in the centre-periphery debate by emphasising the role of the Third World actors as architects both of their own histories and the Cold War international system.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the pericentric framework for the study of the superpower-Third World relations highlighted the limitations of the powerful and the power of the powerless - a pattern that Winston Churchill once referred to as the 'tyranny of the weak.'<sup>36</sup> It revealed the pragmatic approach, employed by African countries in actively engaging the superpowers, taking full advantage of their idiosyncrasies, weaknesses, and ambitions.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, pericentrism asserted, the chief reason for the spread of superpowers' involvement around the globe was the deliberate policies of the lesser actors who pulled Moscow and Washington into situations they might have otherwise avoided. In the pericentric debate, 'pull' from the periphery, not 'push' from the 'centre' usually best describes what happened.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> P. Chamberlin, 'Rethinking the Middle East,' 317. One of the earliest calls for this new Cold War history came with the publication of Gaddis' *We Now Know*.

<sup>34</sup> J. Darwin, 'Diplomacy and decolonization,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28, no. 3 (2000): 5; 22.

<sup>35</sup> Z. Karabell, *Architects of Intervention* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>36</sup> See Laron, 'Stepping Back,' 99 and Karabell, *Architects*, 225-6. Similarly, A. B. Fox termed it 'little man's Machiavelli.' See *The Power of Small States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). The literature on power of small states sees US-Soviet competition as a condition for small-power influence. See D. Vital, *The Inequality of States* (New York: OUP, 1967), 190-1, and G. Liska, *Alliances and the Third World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 44; cf. R. Keohane 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics,' *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 300.

<sup>37</sup> M. Matusevich, *No Easy Row for Russian Hoe* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, 'New Bottles,' 571-2.

### 1.3 Cold War in the Third World

For many years, the literature on superpower involvement in the Third World interpreted Washington and Moscow's competition in remote areas as sustained by indigenous developments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which encouraged external involvement in regional politics and was at the same time intensified by both fear and ambition.<sup>39</sup> US policy was thus driven by a series of amorphous - and largely illusory - military, strategic, and psychological fears.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Moscow's mantra echoed similar tones: '[i]n this world you must deal with capability, not probabilities.'<sup>41</sup> This prompted some observers to see the Cold War as 'a surreal struggle fed by mutual fear.'<sup>42</sup> In addition to global considerations with regards to Washington, the ideological split with Beijing played an instructive role in Moscow's Third World activism, as the Kremlin had to prove that Soviet communism was better than the Chinese model.<sup>43</sup> Following the Bandung Conference in Indonesia of 1955, the notion of the Third World was increasingly deployed to foster unity and mutual support amongst a growing number of nonaligned states which were hesitant to take sides in the emerging Cold War.<sup>44</sup>

The end of the Cold War and the opening of East-European archives, however, resulted in a marked increase in scholarly interest into how Third World objectives

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<sup>39</sup> R. Allison and P. Williams, 'Superpower Competition and Crisis Prevention in the Third World,' in *Superpower Competition and Crisis Prevention in the Third World*, eds. R. Allison and P. Williams (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 1. Cf. M. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power* (Stanford: S[tanford] U[niversity] P[ress], 1992), 262.

<sup>40</sup> R. McMachon, *The Cold War on the Periphery* (New York: C[olumbia] U[niversity] P[ress], 1994), 344-5.

<sup>41</sup> See M. Kaufman's interview with Soviet Ambassador to Seychelles, Yuri Velikanov, in 'Ports and Oil Spur Naval Buildup by US and Soviet,' *New York Times*, 20 April 1981, A12.

<sup>42</sup> D. Everette et al, Introduction to *Beyond the Cold War*, eds. E. Dennis, et al. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 3-4; J. Suri, 'The Cold War, Decolonization, and Global Social Awakenings,' *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (2006): 353-63; Cf. Westad, *Brothers in Arms* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1998) and Kanet, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy toward the Developing World,' 36-7.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. M. Berger, 'The real Cold War was hot,' *Intelligence and National Security* 23, no. 1 (2008): 114.

played out within the global Cold War context.<sup>45</sup> The dominant Cold War narrative suggested that whoever controlled the Third World, would eventually be crowned the winner of the struggle between the two world systems.<sup>46</sup> Gradually over the 1960s and 1970s, the Third World became a battlefield of the superpowers.<sup>47</sup> The KGB director, Andropov, and the Defence Minister, Ustinov, seemed to have been early spokespersons for such views in Moscow. Later, at the beginning of the 1980s, Andropov proudly declared that the KGB was playing its part in the onward march of world revolution, increasing the diplomatic and military power in the conflict against the main adversary in the Third World.<sup>48</sup> For their part, Washington, always led to believe in the simplistic notion that leftist movements and countries were manipulated by Moscow, failed to recognise that such states might have a dynamic of their own. The White House also seemed to dismiss the idea that the Soviet role in Africa depended on African initiatives, and it was not Moscow, which set the rockslide in motion,<sup>49</sup> to use Kissinger's idiom.

Accordingly, recent pericentric scholarship claims that Washington rather habitually evaluated the interests of Third World states with 'a Cold War yardstick that distorted far more than it illuminated.'<sup>50</sup> The competitive mind-set was justified by a

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<sup>45</sup> Vijay Prashad, for example, claimed that the Third World was not a geopolitical entity; rather, it was a project, conceived on less developed countries' own initiative, and was not of Cold War's making as Larry Devlin, the CIA Chief of Station in the Congo in the early 1960s, suggested. See L. Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007) and Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (New York: New Press, 2008), 13. Additionally, Borrowing Sieyès' famous pamphlet 'Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?', Alfred Sauvy concluded that similarly to the Third Estate during the French Revolution, the Third World 'also wanted to be something,' see A. Sauvy, 'Trois Mondes, une Planete,' *L'Observateur*, 14 August 1952, no. 118, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> The accounts of two intelligence officers on both side of the Iron Curtain speak equivocally about the state of competitive superpower coexistence in the third world. See N. Leonov, 'Soviet Intelligence in Latin America during the Cold War,' *Estudios Públicos* 73 (1999): 2 and Devlin's *Chief of Station*.

<sup>47</sup> Brutents, Lysebu, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II*, 471; 480, and 490.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2002) and C. Clapham, *Africa and the International System* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002 [1996]), 142. See also R. Litwak, 'Soviet policies in the Third World,' in *Superpower Competition and Crisis Prevention in the Third World*, 29; See also F. Halliday's *Cold War, Third World* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 29; 31, and *Soviet Policy in the Arc of Crisis* (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), 98. Cf. R. Barnes, *Ideology and the Cold War* (Brighton: Tresse, 1984).

<sup>50</sup> McMachon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 345.

series of misplaced and exaggerated concerns about their vulnerability in the face of presumed military and ideological threat, posed by their respective opponent. The superpowers were, therefore, ‘enemies by position,’ to borrow Raymond Aron’s phrase.<sup>51</sup> The demise of détente in the closing years of 1970s brought the nuclear arms race between Washington and Moscow to a particularly dangerous level. Accordingly, largely as a reaction to the Kremlin’s strategic modernisation programme, the White House launched a substantial military build-up that was aimed at restoring the balance of power, serving the objective to hamper Soviet Union’s international ambitions.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Edward Luttwak, saw the emergence of a new stage in Soviet imperial strategy prior to the invasion of Afghanistan, as representing a different model of Soviet international behaviour.<sup>53</sup> This school of thought accepted a degree of common purpose in Soviet activities directed at threatening Western interests in the Third World.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Soviet policies at the north end of the Suez Canal could not be separated from policies at the south end and in the Persian Gulf.<sup>55</sup> Michael Radu, Richard Lowenthal, and Keith Payne continued this line of analysis by looking into Moscow and its allies’ Third World involvement as part of a wider geopolitical strategy of counter imperialism.<sup>56</sup> In the area south of Sahara, strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean and the crisis in the Southern part of the continent loomed larger. Therefore, it was claimed,

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<sup>51</sup> R. Aron, *Peace and War* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003 [1966]), 282.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); R. Jervis, ‘Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?’ *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 44. See also P. Podvig, ‘The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn’t,’ *International Security* 33, no. 1 (2008): 118.

<sup>53</sup> See E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> M. Clough and D. Jordan, Introduction to *Reassessing the Soviet Challenge in Africa*, ed. M. Clough (Berkeley: U[niversity] of C[alifornia] at B[erkeley], 1986), 5.

<sup>55</sup> T. B. Millar, *Soviet Policies in the Indian Ocean Area*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970), 2-3.

<sup>56</sup> In addition, Rothenberg maintains that Africa was perceived as the most promising arena for enhancing Soviet influence. See *The USSR and Africa* (Miami: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1980), 1; M. Radu, ed. *Eastern Europe and the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1981), R. Lowenthal, ‘Soviet Counter-imperialism,’ *Problems of Communism* 25, no. 6 (1976); K. Payne, ‘Are They Interested in Stability?’ *Comparative Strategy* 3, no. 1 (1981): 16. Similarly, Aspaturian maintains that the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev exhibited a generally expansionist predisposition toward obtaining a position of global advantage over the capitalist West; see ‘Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces,’ *Problems of Communism* 29, no. 1 (1980): 16-7.

Soviet conduct in Africa could be properly understood in terms of Moscow's global priorities and the constraints of its objectives.<sup>57</sup>

The expansion of the Soviet Union as a global power in the mid-1970s, therefore, provided a rationale for Kremlin's continuing quest to expand its authority in global affairs.<sup>58</sup> Importantly, segments of the military held a stake in Third World activism, being attracted by the possibility of increasing revenues from arms sales.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, practical considerations often motivated Moscow's military leadership's in foreign activism. For example, the Soviet ocean-going fleet needed remote maintenance, as it was not cost-effective to call all the ships to port in the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> In the final analysis, according to this view, the Soviet involvement in Africa after 1975 was a result of an evolving propensity to seek geopolitical profit at US loss through involvement in security concerns of Third World clients.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See on Soviet-African relations R. Nation and M. Kauppi, Introduction to *The Soviet Impact in Africa*, eds R. Nation and M. Kauppi. (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1984), 4-5; G. Breslauer, 'Explaining Soviet Policy Changes The Interaction of Politics and Learning,' in *Soviet Policy in Africa*, ed. G. Breslauer (Berkeley: UCB, 1992), 202 and C. Legum, 'USSR Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa,' in *The Soviet Union and the Third World*, 228.

<sup>58</sup> Bessmertnykh, Pocantico Hills, 111; See also Shakhnazarov, Fort Lauderdale, 83. See similar assessment in Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 18. For discussion on Soviet perception on changed correlation of forces and activism in third world see R. Kanet, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy toward the Developing World From Stalin to Brezhnev,' in *The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World*, ed. E. Kolodziej and R. Kanet (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 45; See also Kanet, 'The Soviet Union and the Third World from Khrushchev to Gorbachev,' in *Soviet Union, East Europe and the Third World*, ed. R. Kanet (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 5; 10.

<sup>59</sup> On the bureaucratic structures in soviet foreign policy decision-making see Westad, 'The Fall of Détente and the Turning Tides of History,' 19; See also Gelman. *The Brezhnev Politburo*; also A. Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1985) and G. Breslauer, 'Explaining Soviet Policy Changes The Interaction of Politics and Learning,' in *Soviet Policy in Africa*, 204-5. See also M. Kramer, 'The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy,' *Soviet Studies* 42, no. 3 (1990): 431-2.

<sup>60</sup> Bessmertnykh, Pocantico Hills, 111; See also Shakhnazarov, Fort Lauderdale, 83. According to a high-ranking Soviet Army General, A. A. Danilevich, in the 1960s-70s, twenty-three countries were categorised as potential Soviet threat. Another forty states were seen as neutral, but their orientation, especially in case of war, was uncertain. Quoted from an interview with S. Belanovsky in Ellman and Kontorovich, eds. *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 41, cited by Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 397.

<sup>61</sup> Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo* (Ithaca: CUP, 1984), 165; Cf. M. Katz differentiates Kremlin's objectives in the Third World as positive (the acquisition of bases and resources, the protection of sea lanes, etc.) and negative (the denial of these same benefits to the United States), *Gorbachev's Military Policy in the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

Others, however, dismissed the ‘master plan’ interpretation as an exaggeration of the Kremlin’s abilities to undermine the ‘free world.’<sup>62</sup> Consequently, pericentric interpretations came to focus more on the role of the lesser actors in the superpower global competition. Initially, in the immediate post-WWII period, the Kremlin considered the Middle East to be the most vulnerable area in the Third World, which was close to the Soviet Union and was the most promising in a strategic sense. Subsequently, when the Suez Canal boycott was declared, Moscow sent advisers to replace the Europeans who quit servicing marine traffic, and a friendship with Nasser was forged.<sup>63</sup> In the 1960s, according to Ginor and Remez’s account, the relations between Cairo and Moscow were so close that the two governments colluded in instigating the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.<sup>64</sup> However, a more recent investigation of the economic and strategic aspects of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship in 1964–6, indicates that links between the two countries deteriorated considerably, hitting a nadir on the eve of the June 1967 war. The hidden crisis in the relations between Cairo and Moscow is a valuable case study of a broader phenomenon. Egypt and other Third World radical regimes were not pliant instruments of Soviet manipulation; rather, they were independent players with whom the Soviet Union had to reckon at every turn.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, it must be noted that as the dominant Cold War narrative neglected the periphery by reducing it to a mere appendage to the post-WWII world order,<sup>66</sup> it gave us an incomplete and misleading picture of what was happening in the vast regions of the world beyond the metropolises – Moscow and Washington. On the contrary, by taking into

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<sup>62</sup> R. Garthoff, *A Journey through the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings, 2001), 376; See also Webber, “‘Out of Area,’” 116.

<sup>63</sup> See the interview with Leonov on 23 September 1998 in *Estudios Públicos* 73 (1999): 21-2; see also Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War*, xvii.

<sup>64</sup> I. Ginor and G. Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona* (New Haven: YUP, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> See Laron, ‘Stepping Back from the Third World,’ 118 and Ferris, ‘Guns for Cotton?’ 5. Note also a similar earlier interpretation in A. Rubinstein, ‘Assessing Influence as a Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis,’ in *Soviet and Chinese influence in the Third World*, ed. A. Rubinstein, (New York: Praeger, 1975), 2.

<sup>66</sup> Karabell, *Architects*, 4.

account the local factor, recent interpretations benefits from the sense of the tremendous energy bestowed to the Cold War international system by agents, usually treated as marginal to the superpower conflict. Similarly, even by his own admission, the influential director of the Institute of United States and Canadian Studies in 1980s and member of the CPSU CC, Georgi Arbatov, noted that the local developments in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan were the key factor, precipitating the Soviet involvement there.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Sergei Tarasenko, another MFA specialist on the US, remembered that while the Kremlin was elated by the increasing number of states, embarking on the socialist path of development, Soviet leaders fell victim to their own rhetoric.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, a few Third World states could be properly characterised as either pro-West or pro-Soviet. Irrespective of their temporary alliances, all of them were ‘pro-themselves,’ that is, nationalist.<sup>69</sup> These states, however, used revolutionary slogans rather pragmatically to inspire a sense of nationalism, to overcome forces inimical to social-economic progress, and not least of all to obtain a firm hold on the spoils of power.<sup>70</sup>

#### 1.4 The Horn and the Cold War: between local and global narratives

Nevertheless, while both superpowers had an interest in engaging in competitive coexistence in the Third World, they sought to avoid serious escalation that might draw them into direct confrontation, as well as being restricted by resource limitation and domestic political considerations.<sup>71</sup> In the 1950s, the danger of confrontation between Moscow and Washington appeared greater in the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

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<sup>67</sup> G. Arbatov, *Cold War or Detente?* (London: Zed, 1983).

<sup>68</sup> Sergei Tarasenko, Lysebu, 41.

<sup>69</sup> C. Legum, ‘USSR Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa,’ 229.

<sup>70</sup> While seeing Soviet hand behind every coup d’état on the African continent, Brzezinski nevertheless admits that Third World states might have had an agenda of their own. See ‘Conclusion: The African Challenge,’ in *Africa and the Communist World*, ed. Z. Brzezinski (Stanford: SUP, 1964), 205.

<sup>71</sup> MacFarlane, ‘Taking Stock,’ 22-3.

On the other hand, the risk of superpower confrontation seemed to be smaller in Africa, which explained why Khrushchev regarded that continent as an especially promising national-liberation arena.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Peter Rodman's historical analysis saw the restraining effect of the American debacle in Vietnam as a potential external motivator to Soviet activism in the Third World. In the aftermath of Vietnam, the Americans lost their self-confidence and credibility and the Russians quickly rushed to fill this power vacuum on the international stage.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the Soviet Union embarked in 1977-9 on a number of ventures that departed from the rather cautious pattern of its foreign policy during the early years of Brezhnev's regime, overlooking the importance their activism might have had with their American counterpart.<sup>74</sup>

While the Ethiopian-Somali conflict has often been regarded as a classic example of a dispute caused, or at least seriously exacerbated, by superpower rivalry, recent studies showed that Addis Ababa and Mogadishu were not passive victims of the superpowers. Undeniably, while the conflict between them was made possible by the quantities of armaments pumped in by the major powers,<sup>75</sup> none of the local leaders was a puppet, controlled by either the Kremlin or the White House. In fact, both superpowers were invited to intervene by regimes that they had not installed in power in the first place. In other words, both Ethiopia and Somalia tried to influence the policies of the great powers in the Horn in order to obtain support for their own agendas.<sup>76</sup> The literature on superpowers' involvement in the Horn of Africa widely accepts that Moscow and

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<sup>72</sup> Hosmer and Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice*, 22.

<sup>73</sup> P. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994).

<sup>74</sup> See A. Ulam, *Dangerous Relations* (New York: OUP, 1983), 177. Cf. Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo*, 166.

<sup>75</sup> C. Clapham, 'The Horn of Africa: A Conflict Zone,' in *Conflict in Africa*, ed. O. Furley (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), 77. In addition, during the 1970s, African states took advantage of a marked upsurge in arms sales worldwide. From 1970 to 1978, global arms transfers increased from USD 9.1bn annually to USD 19.1bn, it was burgeoning market with the United States providing 39 per cent and the Soviet Union 29 per cent of the shipments. From 1978 to 1982, African nations and movements alone imported USD 31bn in military hardware, reflecting a dramatic increase in purchases, See J. Feffer, *Beyond Détente* (London: I. B. Taurus and Co., 1989), 91.

<sup>76</sup> M. Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 2.

Washington's primary interest in the area was geo-strategic, due to the Horn's location at the crossroads between black Africa and the Arab world, overlooking a network of international sea routes.<sup>77</sup> In late 1977, Moscow's weakened position in the Middle East seriously eroded the foundation of US-Soviet relations, and the Kremlin turned its attention to the opportunities, presented by the growing unrest in Southern and Eastern Africa.<sup>78</sup> The Soviet exclusion from the Middle East meant that the Politburo was less hesitant in coming to the aid of the Marxist leader of Ethiopia.<sup>79</sup> The complication of Ethiopian-Somali relations over Ogaden presented Moscow with the prospect of losing ground in the Horn, provided by its infrastructural installations on the Somali coast.

A corollary hypothesis of Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World, which this thesis supports, posits that the Kremlin's activism was further motivated by perceived threats of imminent loss.<sup>80</sup> Craig Nation, for example, argues that the Soviet Union developed a fairly coherent tactical approach towards Africa, marked by short term flexibility, and a careful evaluation of long-term structural tendencies.<sup>81</sup> In the Horn, Soviet-Cuban cooperation was not an outgrowth of a long-term politico-military strategy to shape the future on the Horn. Rather, Soviet-Cuban policies were found to be rather an ad hoc response,<sup>82</sup> delivering a spectacular quick fix,<sup>83</sup> when the Soviets faced the complete expulsion from the region. This hypothesis, which understands Moscow's

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<sup>77</sup> L. Grau, 'Soviet Soldier-Internationalists in Support of Communist Revolutions,' in *Mysteries of the Cold War*, ed. S. Cimbala (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 186; Cf. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, *The Horn of Africa and Poverty*, 96; See also R. Kanet and M. Rajan Menon, 'Soviet Policy toward the Third World,' 258; C. Legum, 'Angola and the Horn of Africa,' in *Diplomacy of Power*, ed. S. Kaplan (Washington: Brookings, 1981), 607.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Dobrynin, *Pocantico Hills*, 104; See Gavshon, *Crisis in Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 263.

<sup>79</sup> W. Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 137-8.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. S. Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); See also D. Ross 'Risk Aversion in Soviet Decision-making' in *Soviet Decision-making for National Security*, and R. Herrmann, 'Perceptions and Behavior in Soviet Foreign Policy,' in *Classical Issues in Soviet Foreign Policy*, eds F. Fleron et al (London: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991). See also D. Kahneman and A. Tverski, 'Prospect Theory,' *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (1979) and 'Choices, Values, and Frames,' *American Psychologist* 39, no. 4 (1984).

<sup>81</sup> R. Craig Nation, 'Soviet Engagement in Africa,' in *The Soviet Impact in Africa*, 27-8.

<sup>82</sup> B. Dunér, *The Bear, the Cubs and the Eagle* (Aldershot: Gower, 1987), 44.

<sup>83</sup> Henze, 'Marxism-Leninism in Ethiopia,' in *Reassessing the Soviet Challenge in Africa*, 46.

tactical approach as a mixture of short-term flexibility and careful assessment of long-term strategic considerations, proves useful in analysing Soviet's activities in a fluid local setting, such as the Horn where local developments and global objectives required flexibility and reflexivity.

#### 1.4.1 Kremlin pulled by the Horn?

Admittedly, in the Horn, Russia and then the Soviet Union were guided by their own national interests, applying a great deal of flexibility, containing elements of prudence and aggressive opportunism.<sup>84</sup> First, St Petersburg aimed its local activities at its regional foes – the Great Britain and Italy. Then, in the 1950s, Moscow re-entered the Horn of Africa, stimulated by the presence of its new arch-rival – the United States. The traditional aspect of Russia's interest in the Horn has been evoked on numerous occasions throughout the diplomatic exchange between Tsarist and Soviet Russia and Ethiopia. Historically, Tsar Nicholas II's help to Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the Soviet Union's diplomatic support in the League of Nations to Haile Selassie during the Italian occupation in the WWII, are two key episodes in the pre-Cold War era that highlight Russian interest in this part of Africa. In both cases, which were equally pertinent to Ethiopia's survival, Russia and then the Soviet Union were guided by their own national interests. In either situation, Ethiopia had been the fulcrum of Russian regional designs aimed at her greatest regional rivals – Great Britain and Italy. Similarly, the picture had not changed radically by the 1950s when in the Soviets' eyes Washington sought to replace Britain in the North-East Africa. With the

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<sup>84</sup> For this approach see S. Hosmer and T. Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice toward Third World conflicts* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1983), xvii-xviii, 17; See also T. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 138; Cf. W. Duncan and C. Ekedahl, *Moscow and the Third World under Gorbachev* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 16; Cf. R. Shultz Jr, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Warfare* (Stanford: Hoover, 1988), 13.

incorporation of the new Cold War world order with regional developments in the nexus of North-East Africa and the Middle East, and the local Horn of Africa opportunities further intensified Moscow's ambition in the 1960s-70s to continue maintaining its presence in the strategic Horn.

In addition, the level and nature of Soviet commitments, perceived by the literature as shaped not only by strategies of power projection and proletarian internationalism, but also by a diligent assessment, were based on the location of the state, the nature of Soviet interests involved, and the anticipated reaction of the United States.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the USSR's decision to intervene in the Ogaden war was seen as different from the decision to switch allegiances. The latter was a tactical decision made in an effort to maintain influence in the region. By contrast, the intervention as a means to strengthen the Ethiopian regime,<sup>86</sup> which placed ideology at the heart of its strategy of state survival,<sup>87</sup> was a result of long-term ideological and political calculation. Moscow's aging leadership was encouraged, not only by the possibility of acquiring new allies in the Horn, but also by the desire to see the flag of socialist revolution waived in remote areas.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Ethiopia was considered as resourceful enough to repay part of the Soviet investment had the revolution succeeded. With proper investment and management, Ethiopia could feed its people and still maintain an adequate level of agricultural exports.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See R. Menon, *Soviet Power and the Third World*, 88; Similar views expressed by F. Halliday, *Soviet Policy in the Arc of Crisis* (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), 29-30; Kanet, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy toward the Developing World,' 36-7; M. Light, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy in the Third World,' in *Troubled Friendships*, ed. M. Light (London: British Academy Press, 1993), 2; S. Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War* (Stanford: SUP, 2010), 6. See also R. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), xiii.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. A. Bennett, *Condemned do Repetition?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>87</sup> Westad, 'Devices and Desires,' *Cold War History* 6, no 3 (2006): 375.

<sup>88</sup> A. Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 364. See also Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 253, and R. Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 189.

<sup>89</sup> T. Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979), 135.

Previous studies of Soviet-Third World relations provide an insight for this thesis. First, this study benefits from analyses of the influence of Soviet ideology, state interests, and domestic politics over its external relations with the less developed countries. In addition, this thesis accepts that the Soviet leadership's activism in Africa was dependent on Moscow's global priorities and the constraints of its objectives. Accordingly, the opportunistic school's notion of Moscow's tactical approach, mixing elements of prudence and aggressive opportunism, while strengthened by short term flexibility and a careful evaluation of long-term structural assessment serves as a starting point for this study. In addition, this thesis profits from the literature on superpower involvement in the Third World, which by taking into account the local factor, highlights the energy given to the Cold War world order by actors, usually treated as marginal to the superpower conflict. Lastly, this research benefits from recent studies which have increasingly come to pay more attention to the close connection between domestic and foreign policy which requires a deeper knowledge in the degrees of influence of various political and institutional interests within the Soviet leadership.

Essentially, while this thesis will agree with recent interpretations of the superpowers' Third World conduct, underlining the role of the local factor in attracting metropolitan interest, it will take a more nuanced approach in treating the interaction between local and regional, on the one hand, and global and domestic considerations, on the other, in the formulation of Soviet policy. Unlike previous studies of Soviet-Third World involvement, this thesis will provide an insight into the role of Moscow's East European allies. According to the memoirs of Moscow Third World envoys,<sup>90</sup> the activities of Soviet military and civilian diplomatic staff were maximised by the missions of the other Bloc states. Soviet Bloc missions acted as the 'front-line units,' carrying on

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. A. Kaznacheev, *Inside a Soviet Embassy* (London: Robert Hale, 1963 [1962]) and S. Sinitsyn, *Missiya v Éfiopii* (Moskva: Institut Afriki RAN, 2000).

activities of penetration — political, economic, and cultural - thus preparing the ground for future Communist take-over. Moreover, Bloc intelligence played an instrumental role in assisting Moscow's struggle against capitalism, in situations where traditional diplomatic methods in pursuit of Soviet political goals proved to be useless.<sup>91</sup> This thesis will aim to show that the assistance rendered by the East European countries, traditionally perceived as forming the so-called Soviet Bloc, became crucial in Moscow's activities on the ground.<sup>92</sup>

More importantly, drawing upon the pericentric debate on the centre-periphery relations during the Cold War, this research will try to offer a more nuanced approach towards understanding the relationship between the local and the global. We understand that the initial act of engagement in the Horn was on Moscow's and Washington's initiative in unison with their global ambitions. Once Moscow became engaged in the field, the complexity of the local setting, strengthened by the role of the actors on the ground, such as the local leaders, Moscow's diplomatic envoys, the Bloc's associates, proved more capable of helping Moscow's leaders to see local developments through the prism of their international, strategic thinking. On the other hand, Moscow's withdrawal, like its entry, was another strategic, pro-active, decision, which was developed in response to the Kremlin's global priorities and its relations with Washington.

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<sup>91</sup> Kaznacheev, *Inside*, 79; 140. See also D. Dallin, *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven: YUP, 1955), vii; 15. Cf. J. Frolik, *The Frolik Defection* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975), 115-6.

<sup>92</sup> While Albania and Yugoslavia are often excluded from discussions of East European international, the latter has been a leader of the non-aligned movement and as such has had close relations with the Third World. On the other hand, Albania's role has been much less important and visible, but it still deserves attention. See A. Korbonski, 'Eastern Europe and the Third World,' in *The Soviet Union and the Third World*, 94-5.

## 2. Methodology

In tracing the factors that shaped Moscow's policies in the Horn, this thesis aims to integrate the story of Soviet involvement in Ethiopia and Somalia with broader trends in international history, particularly with regard to the recent emphasis on 'decentralising' and 'globalising' the Cold War narrative.<sup>93</sup> It offers an analytical account of Soviet foreign policy towards the Horn from 1947 to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. By constructing 'consecutive narrative'<sup>94</sup> of the Soviet Union's responses to critical events in the Horn, this thesis will offer an analysis, illuminating the 'interdependence of geopolitics and ideology'<sup>95</sup> using a pericentric interpretative framework for the study of Soviet Third World activism in the Cold War.

### 2.1 The Method: Studying Soviet-Horn relations as a 'multipolar diplomatic history'

This thesis has a two-fold objective. On the one hand, it aims to present new evidence of Soviet-Horn relations, and, on the other, it tries to utilise new approaches, developed by recent scholarship on centre-periphery relations during the Cold War. First, this study focuses on the interaction between the ideological and *realpolitik* lines in Soviet foreign policy towards the Horn. Secondly, it looks into the role of the actors on the periphery, combining the pull of the local leaders, the influence of the Soviet and Bloc diplomatic and intelligence personnel in informing Moscow's metropolitan thinking. Lastly, it takes into account the perspectives on Soviet local policy of two sets of international actors - the Kremlin's East European allies, and the Western powers and their regional friends. Ultimately, in so doing, this thesis will aim to contribute to the study of the Cold War

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. with regard to similar approaches to study of relation between Cold-War objectives of superpowers and Middle Eastern regional political dynamics - Byrne, 'The Middle Eastern Cold War,' 320.

<sup>94</sup> J. Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, xi.

<sup>95</sup> M. Leffler, 'Bringing it Together: The Parts and the Whole,' in *Reviewing the Cold War*, 43.

international history by offering a detailed historical revision of a notable case in Soviet's activism in the Third World.

This study aims to construct a 'multipolar'<sup>96</sup> diplomatic history' of Soviet involvement in the Horn as told by diplomatic representatives of a wide array of actors, ranging from Washington to Moscow, through London, Berlin, Prague, Belgrade, and Sofia. As Bruce Cummings noted, the third round of Cold War history, which gathered prominence with the opening of East European archives, is in effect an 'international history' done 'multiarchivally,' being quintessentially a 'multiarchival diplomatic history,'<sup>97</sup> requiring in turn 'multipolar analysis.'<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, weaving together a 'multipolar diplomatic history' of superpower involvement in a Third World setting is a daunting task, calling for detailed knowledge of the local scene, as well as a firm grasp of strategic ideas and perceptions devised in Moscow and Washington.<sup>99</sup>

Accordingly, this thesis will try to place events in the Horn within a broader international context. This, in turn, will help us obtain a better understanding of the 'global currents of historical change'<sup>100</sup> as they occurred not only in the metropolises, but in the periphery, as well. The analysis of the interaction between the actors in a multipolar political environment will aim to cast light on Soviet, as well as American, 'strategies' and 'motivations'<sup>101</sup> in the Third World by enriching the dominant Cold War narrative with a view from the periphery.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Here, 'Multipolar,' instead of implying the degree of autonomy and polarity of the actors involved, signifies the inclusion in the analysis of various point of views and perceptions, in addition to the participation of a number of different local and external players.

<sup>97</sup> B.Cummings, 'Revising Post-revisionism,' *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 4 (1993): 560.

<sup>98</sup> Westad, Introduction to *Reviewing the Cold War*, 5; Cf. Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 282.

<sup>99</sup> W. Wohlforth, 'Superpowers, Interventions and the Third World,' *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (2006): 365-71; 365; See M. Leffler, 'Bringing it Together,' 58, and A. Hilger, 'Sowjetunion, Realsozialismus und Dritte Welt, 1945–1991 Einleitung,' in *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt UdSSR*, ed. A. Hilger (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2009), 15-6.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. P. Chamberlin, 'Rethinking the Middle East,' 319.

<sup>101</sup> Strategy here is used as 'an imaginative idea that orchestrates and/or inspires sets of actions in response to a given problem.' See L. Paquette, *Strategy and Ethnic Conflict* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 6; Motivation is understood to be 'underlying forces that activate a state in its political behaviour; they

In essence, this study is an interpretive, historical account of Moscow's Cold War relations with the Horn, resting at the nexus of the 'pull' of the 'local actors' and the 'push' of the metropolis. In analysing the interaction between the centre and periphery, we see the local actors as a group of players competing, via their respective communication channels, for the metropolis' attention. On one hand, there was the Soviet and the Bloc diplomatic representatives, whose role, as the Horn's case demonstrated, proved indispensable in matching the requirements of the Centre with the realities on the ground. On the other hand, there were the local leaders, who attempted to attract support for their respective causes. Finally, there was a third, 'anonymous' group of 'local actors' – the network of the Soviet Bloc's security detail, with its roster of local informants, who had a valuable role not only in intelligence gathering, but also in assessing the local environment. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide a fresh treatment of the pericentric debate, by developing a more nuanced perspective on the modes in which various local actors came to influence the metropolitan thinking.

Existing scholarship and original multiarchival research in the partially open Soviet archives, aided by more comprehensive access to foreign policy papers originating in the former Czechoslovakia, PRB, Yugoslavia, and GDR, in addition to American and British sources, are used in this research. East European archives proved very useful in outlining the interaction and the level of co-ordination between Moscow and its Bloc allies. In addition, papers from Prague, Sofia, and Berlin demonstrated that while the Soviet Union and the East European states followed the same direction in their local activism, in their

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are the driving power that energises the will to action.' See Aspaturian, 'A Framework for Analysing Soviet Foreign Policy,' in *Classic Issues in Soviet Foreign Policy From Lenin to Brezhnev*, eds. F. Fleron et al (New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1991), 156.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. similar approaches to the study of Superpower-Third World relation in M. Connelly, 'Taking off the Cold War Lens,' *American Historical Review* 105 (2000). See also Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: CUP, 2007). Cf. J. Byrne, 'The Middle Eastern Cold War,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 320 and N. Citino, 'Between Global and Regional Narratives,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 313.

day-to-day activities the Bloc states attempted to freelance in furthering the common objectives. Nevertheless, when the local situation became more complex, Moscow assumed its command role in a bid to maximise the outcome of their combined effort.

On the other hand, material from Western archives provided an important insight into Washington and London diplomats' views on Bloc's activities on the ground, which did not always agree with those of the respective metropolises. Former Yugoslavia's archive also proved interesting in providing an impartial account of a prominent 'non-aligned' state in the international affairs. Enjoying a strong position within the Ethiopian Imperial court, thanks to Haile Selassie's desire to attach his country to the non-aligned movement, Yugoslav representatives managed to avoid, to a greater extent, the Emperor's restrictive measures that were applied to other foreign actors. This allowed them a valuable position to observe the processes within the country, as well as to assess the policies of the two competing power blocs. All this came to paint a vivid picture of what David Engermann termed 'the Second World's Third World.'<sup>103</sup>

Last, but not least, the Soviet Union's involvement in the Horn throughout the Cold War amounts to an enthralling *histoire événementielle*, detailing the tensions between superpower objectives and the Horn's colonial heritage. While the interpretive focus falls on the examination of the factors behind the Soviet Third World policy, this thesis' framework also aims to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between Soviet actions and the internal dynamics of Somalia and Ethiopia. This will not only illuminate the case study at hand, but will also aim to contribute to providing a more nuanced study of Soviet-Horn relations, in particular, and superpower-Third World interaction during the Cold War, in general. In the final analysis, this thesis understands the Soviet behaviour towards Somalia and Ethiopia as a 'result of a process,

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<sup>103</sup> D. Engerman, 'The Second World's Third World,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011).

incorporating local and global perceptions,<sup>104</sup> seen through the Kremlin's ideological and realpolitik optics, emphasising the limitations and the idiosyncrasies of the Soviet Union's journey from continental to global power.<sup>105</sup>

## 2.2 The Argument

This thesis argues against the conventional notion that Moscow pursued an active strategy of expansion in countering Western influence in the Third World. On the contrary, this study aims to show that, in the Horn's case, Moscow did not 'engineer' the main cause for local distress, the Ethiopian-Somali conflict, for the sake of its global ambitions. In contrast to previous interpretations, the thesis will maintain that while the Soviet Union attempted to embed presence in both Somalia and Ethiopia, as part of the general low risk priority given to the area, it, in fact, favoured stability as long as this helped to strengthen its local standing at US expense. Respectively, the escalation of neighbourly tensions were seen by the Kremlin as detrimental to its high-priority global interests.

Interestingly, this thesis will show that through the Cold War, Moscow's actions in the Horn developed a pattern, according to which the Kremlin reacted to events of local significance, such as regime changes. On the other hand, as evidence suggests, the Kremlin proved more pro-active in situations that might have affected high-priority issues, concerning strategic balance of power and the relationships with the United States. This pattern was further strengthened by the local role of Moscow's East-European allies. While, in their daily activities on the ground the Bloc states were able to freelance in furthering common objectives, when the local environment became more complex,

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. G. Allison and P. Zelikow, *Essence of Decision* (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> T. Paterson, 'Cold War Revisionism,' *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 391. As J. Ziegler claims the USSR has become a superpower defending its own interests in the Third World see J. Copans, 'The USSR, Alibi or Instrument for Black African States?' In *The Third World and the Soviet Union*, ed. Z. Laidi (London: Zed Books, 1980), 27-8; Cf. J. Ziegler, *Re Lebelles* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983).

Moscow assumed its commanding role in order to maximise the result of their combined effort and avoid losses in its local standing and prestige.

This study will argue that Moscow's European allies, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and the GDR, who, unlike Poland, Hungary, and Romania, played a more active role in the local setting, coordinated their actions to further the Soviet line through close communication with Moscow. The Soviet Union needed the support of its European allies as it had to keep a low profile in Ethiopia in an attempt not to irritate the local regime and Washington. However, this jeopardised the standing and the limited commercial stake of the Bloc states, who found themselves under close scrutiny from the local authorities. Despite this, the role of the Bloc states in Ethiopia increased following the 1974 coup. While Berlin entered the local arena in the early 1970s, Prague and Sofia by then had already established trade contacts and engaged successfully in accepting students to their universities. This provided the Bloc countries with a considerable ability for obtaining information, which, once exchanged with the other Bloc representatives during their regular meetings, helped enrich Soviet diplomats' views and ultimately Moscow's perceptions on the ground.

Accordingly, this thesis will also show that local representatives' information and pro-active moves, enabled Moscow's flexible approach, which combined elements of both assertive opportunism in obtaining local presence, and prudence needed for maintaining it. Therefore, this study sees the ideological and the statist approaches in Moscow's foreign policy, not in conflict with one another, but rather in combination, incorporated into a flexible, tactical approach, aimed at maximising influence with whatever means were available – ideological, military, diplomatic. The approach was 'flexible,' as while it showed continuity with Leninist formulae for the role of the Soviet power on the international scene, it was also adjusted to domestic political priorities that

changed over time throughout the Cold War. In addition, while Moscow was concerned in maximising its presence, it also showed considerable effort in adjusting its position in relations with other external actors, most notably the United States. This provided the Kremlin's leaders with the room for manoeuvre they needed in a complex local setting that included opposition forces, who developed considerable ability in exploiting the Cold War international context to their own benefit.

Importantly, another strand in the argument made in the thesis is interwoven with the pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War. The thesis shows that both US and Soviet initial engagement was related to their wider geopolitical concerns. Once the Kremlin engaged in the field, however, the informative role of the Soviet-Bloc representatives proved instrumental in helping Moscow's leaders understand local developments through the prism of their geostrategic thinking, justifying the exercise of maintaining a presence. As with entry, disengagement was predicated on strategic considerations. The period of momentous socio-political reformation of the Soviet system, which assigned to regional strife lower priority on the international agenda, precipitated Moscow's withdrawal from local hotbeds of tension.

### 3. Chapter outline

This thesis will offer a detailed examination of the Soviet involvement in Somalia and Ethiopia in six chronological chapters, spanning the Cold War era. They will construct a sequential narrative of Moscow's responses to critical events, occurring in the broader Cold War context, as well as the narrower North-East African/Middle Eastern region, and the local Ethiopian-Somali setting. Each chapter will outline the impact of those international developments over the policy responses and initiatives of the Soviet domestic actors and diplomatic representatives. Special attention will also be paid to the

interaction between the ideological and the statist approaches in Soviet foreign policy. Last but not least, the role played by Soviet East European allies will form an important element in this historical narrative.

### 3.1 Entering the Horn

The opening chapter will concentrate on the period between the establishment of Ethiopian-Soviet diplomatic relations in 1947, and after the signing of military agreement between Moscow and Mogadishu in 1963. This portion of the thesis will examine Moscow's reaction to crucial local developments, ranging from the exit of the colonial power, following the end of the WWII to the increase of American interest in the North-East Africa in the early 1950s. After outlining the traditional aspects in Russian's interest in the Horn, this chapter will trace the Kremlin's immediate actions in the late-1940s, through which it aimed to acquire presence in the area. As early as 1951, Stalin had already begun to consider ways by which Moscow could increase its influence in the former colonies. It was Khrushchev, however, who turned this tacit realisation into practice: the Soviet Union had to go to the East; the great-power's policies had to be global. In the Horn, this chapter will hold, Moscow's new approach to the East was manifested by an increased interest in Ethiopia that at the time served Washington's regional ends by enhancing the Pentagon's communication capabilities in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East. Somali independence in 1960, on the other hand, triggered a prolonged period of tension, exacerbated by Somali territorial pretences towards its neighbours. This at first stimulated Moscow's newly acquired superpower reflexes, culminating with the signing of military and commercial agreements with Mogadishu. The Kremlin's initial enthusiasm was swiftly replaced by a more careful evaluation and policy implementation which were aimed at balancing between Ethiopia and Somalia.

This flexibility confirmed once more the validity of the Soviet foreign policy's dualism, locked between diplomacy and revolution and followed the gradual disappointment of the Soviet civilian leadership regarding the prospect of African socialist transformations.

### 3.2 Hedging bets

The next chapter will argue that the presence of Ethiopian-Somali border issues was the main catalyst for the shift in the Soviet's tactical approach towards the Horn in the early 1960s. This corroborates the thesis that instability was considered damaging to Moscow's paramount national interests as it increased the likelihood of further antagonising Washington. While the Kremlin's military leaders' opinion figured prominently at high policy discussions of the 1963 military assistance, it ultimately gave way to the more cautious assessment of the MFA. This translated on the ground into a milder political course, aiming to strike a balance between the Comintern and the Narkomindel lines. Therefore, as a result of the Ethiopian-Somali border clashes, to which Moscow showed disagreement, and Mogadishu's unreasonable demands for military and economic assistance, the Soviet Union engaged in a hedging exercise in the Horn. While engaged in Mogadishu, Moscow launched a careful propaganda effort in Addis Ababa. Soviet actions in Ethiopia, however, were severely impeded by the Imperial Regime's suspicion, allegedly induced by America's representatives. The relatively quiet local scene in the 1960s underlined the competitive behaviour of the two superpowers. Their efforts aimed to check each other's activities in an attempt to advance their own political means at the expense of the other.

### 3.3 The strategic Horn

Chapter three will show that towards the end-1960s the wider Horn witnessed sweeping political shifts as leftist military regimes seized power in Mogadishu and Khartoum. These opportunities, seemingly developed without Moscow's active participation, run almost in parallel with the gradual diminishing of the Kremlin's influence in the Middle East. During the period, the Soviet military-strategic complex played an important role in informing the Kremlin's Horn policies by emphasising the increased value of the Indian Ocean for superpower confrontation. Somalia occupied a central role in the Soviet navy's regional plans, owing to its proximity to strategically vital ship lanes in the North West portion of the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the pursuit of Soviet geostrategic objectives in Mogadishu met the Somalis' strong opposition. While noting the precarious local situation, Moscow successfully maintained a presence in the country.

Arguably, the vast expansion of Soviet military infrastructural projects along the Indian Ocean coast served more Moscow's ends than Siad's inward looking expansionist plans. While it appeared that the Kremlin's informed Mogadishu on a need to know basis regarding the nature of its infrastructural installations, the Somali president skilfully played this card to his own advantage. Moscow's own ambitions in Somalia were used by Siad as a bargaining chip, used to woo the Americans. Importantly, this chapter will emphasise that, while Moscow aimed to advance its regional plans by installing facilities furthering its regional, and ultimately global plans, locally it opposed Somalia's aggressive plans against Ethiopia. Therefore, the Kremlin's task in this direction seemed to be almost impossible, owing to the amounts of weapons shipped to the country. Consequently, the Kremlin had to exercise a mixture of technical and legal constraints in order to control Somalia's expansionism. As a result, this added an additional strain to Moscow's already untenable position in Mogadishu.

### 3.4 Walking the revolutionary tightrope

Chapter four will look into the sweeping socio-political changes in Ethiopia that took place following the February 1974 coup and will examine the evolution of Ethiopian-Soviet relations until the end of 1976. At the beginning of 1970s, the aging Ethiopian Emperor reacted inadequately to the complex domestic environment aggravated by severe drought, followed by wide-spread famine, and social unrest in the provinces. These events were closely watched by the KGB, whose operatives proved highly critical of Haile Selassie's internal conduct. Throughout the spring, Moscow warily observed the rapidly transforming domestic scene. Similarly, the ascendance of the radical group within the military junta in the summer did not produce immediate, positive reaction from the Soviet Union and its East European allies. On the contrary, Bloc diplomats, while acknowledging the revolutionary zeal of Ethiopian progressive forces, watched with a great concern as the manifestation of internal conflict and discontent spread to the edges of the empire. Arguably, the unstable situation in Addis Ababa provided the forces of 'reaction' with opportunities to suffocate the processes of social transformation. Cautiously, Moscow's representatives and their East European colleagues offered tacit diplomatic support.

A major turn in the Bloc state's attitude towards Ethiopia's move to the left came with the adoption on 20 April 1976 of the Programme for National Democratic Revolution. Crucially, this chapter will show that the development of Ethiopian-Soviet relations over 1975-6 is a valuable case study of the manner in which Moscow responded to opportunities, bred at the crux of revolutionary rhetoric and the imperative of state survival. Although Addis Ababa sought urgent deliveries of military materiel, Moscow was not ready to fully commit and pressed for the development of cultural and political ties, while not objecting to Ethiopia's retaining its economic ties with the West.

Therefore, this chapter argues, the Kremlin saw its engagement in Ethiopia as a long-term operation, while the Derg demanded urgent decisions needed in its fight for survival.

### 3.5 From the power of diplomacy to the diplomacy of power

In the latter half of 1976, the struggle between Mengistu Haile Mariam, who Moscow, persuaded by its local representatives, recognised as the revolutionary driver within the Ethiopia's military ranks, and his internal opponents was seen by the Soviet Union as a battle between the forces of the revolution and the reaction. As chapter six will show Mengistu's coup in early 1977 was the pivotal moment which prompted Moscow to ramp up its material support in defence of the revolution following the Comintern line in its foreign policy. In addition to the increased Soviet interest in Ethiopia, the spring of 1977 witnessed the reinforcement of Havana's commitment to the Addis Ababa, as well. Subsequently, the Cuban leader took the lead in strengthening not only the Soviet, but also his East German counterparts' persuasion in the validity of Mengistu's revolutionary potential. The latter's drastic measures against the American interests in Ethiopia met with the approval of the Socialist Bloc states.

After the closure of the American institutions in Ethiopia and the subsequent rapprochement between Mogadishu and Washington, the Horn entered a critical juncture. In addition, the Mogadishu-backed guerrilla raids into Ogaden launched with Somali support in the summer showed to Moscow and its Bloc allies that the situation was going from bad to worse. The change in local dynamics required an adjustment in Moscow's diplomatic approach. While in the spring the Kremlin relied on the power of diplomacy, towards the autumn, it opted for diplomacy of power. Moscow chose to toughen its stance towards Siad, whose aggressive actions severely threatened the Ethiopian revolution and coincided with the interest of Moscow's international opponents.

In November, following the Somali abrogation of the friendship treaty, signed in 1974, Moscow faced total expulsion from the region. As a result, the Kremlin launched a massive air re-supply mission in support of Mengistu's regime. Aided by Cuban and South Yemeni troops, the campaign helped the Ethiopian army deter the Somali attacks. However, Moscow's civilian leadership applied the Narkomindel approach when Soviet military circles thought of counterattacking on Somali soil in the spring of 1978. The Kremlin dismissed this plan fearing that the Soviet-backed Ethiopian entry into Somalia would be seen by the West, the OAU, and the international community, at large, as against the spirit of Moscow's prior involvement in the region, which the Kremlin sought to portray as bound to promoting local stability. It was expected to spur wide-spread international dispute and to additionally complicate Soviet-American relations. The preservation of the latter remained Moscow's top foreign priority, despite the Carter Administration's belief to the contrary.

### 3.6 The road to withdrawal

The final chapter will examine the period of Soviet involvement in the Horn following the Ogaden war until the end of Mengistu and Siad Barre's rule in Ethiopia and Somalia, respectively, which coincided with the end of the Cold War and the termination of the Soviet military mission to Ethiopia. The chapter, will therefore, look into the Moscow's road to withdrawal from the Horn. The Gorbachev transformation of foreign policy, as well as the paramount issues of underdevelopment within the Third World, ran in parallel with a gradual normalisation of the relationship between Washington and Moscow, replacing the period of rapid deterioration in the early 1980s. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was followed by similar actions in other parts of the world. In the Horn, both

superpowers' attempt to settle Ethiopia's disputes with Somalia and Eritrea faced serious resistance on part of Addis Ababa's regime.

While Moscow fulfilled its previous obligations to Mengistu's increasingly militant regime, the late 1980s witnessed Gorbachev's resolve to put all military deliveries to an end. The precarious internal Somali situation, marked by the separation of the north and an increasingly internecine warfare in the south, led to Siad's departure in early 1991. After ousting their last Cold War patron, the United States, Somalia was left to its own devices and withered. Across the border, American rapprochement with Mengistu's opposition forces and Moscow's reluctance to provide more military assistance to the regime caused the Derg's collapse. Finally, by highlighting the end-game of the Horn's revolutionary regimes in the shadow of the Cold War's demise, this chapter will provide an additional insight into the mode in which superpower antagonism equipped the small states with a key policy instrument through which they 'pulled' Moscow and Washington into their locales in service of their own purposes. The nature of the Cold War zero-sum game, on the other hand, provided the justification for superpowers' competitive behaviour in remote areas, previously thought of as insignificant. Once the tension that provoked the entry became absent, their withdrawal followed.

## Chapter One

### **Moscow enters the Horn:**

September 1947 – December 1963

#### I. 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the last century, Russia's contacts with Africa were few. After the October revolution, the realisation of the advantage of spreading revolutionary ideas amongst peoples under colonial rule prompted the Kremlin to increase its pursuit of practical steps to further this end. In addition, the colonial powers attempted to prevent Moscow from establishing presence in their protectorates.<sup>106</sup> However, with Hitler's rise to power, owing to Stalin's search for collective security in Europe, the Soviet Union's interest in Africa diminished further. During the immediate post-war period, however, the Kremlin attempted to gain a foothold in the former Italian colony of Tripolitania, but the Soviet initiative floundered. At the time, Stalin also established diplomatic relations with the re-installed to the throne by the British Haile Selassie. Despite these developments, as the Soviet military lacked the necessary military capability for overseas power projection, Stalin remained largely engaged with consolidating his control over Eastern Europe.<sup>107</sup>

However, in the case of Ethiopia, the Russians had developed enduring political and diplomatic relations, going back to late nineteenth century. Ethiopia was then the only African state, which established relationships with both St Petersburg and Moscow. Tsarist interest in Ethiopia was attracted by the need to restrain Russia's major adversaries – Britain and Italy. Similarly, in the mid-1950s, the US entry into Ethiopia further motivated Moscow's attempt to enter the Horn. The early programme of

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<sup>106</sup> H. Brind, 'Soviet policy in the Horn of Africa,' *International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (1983-4): 75.

<sup>107</sup> L. Gann, 'The Soviet Union and Sub-Saharan Africa: 1917-1974,' in *The Red Orchestra*, ed. D. Bark (Stanford: SUP, 1988), 15.

economic assistance, launched in the late-1950s, aimed to counter Washington's advances, was changed to a pragmatic application of tentative propaganda, following the abortive coup of December 1960. As the Soviet Union's activities were closely watched by the local regime and Western representatives, Moscow allowed its East European allies Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria to engage in trade activities with Addis Ababa, whilst remaining vigilant against possible Western provocations.

Importantly, in July 1960, the local situation changed remarkably with the arrival of Somali independence. Consequently, by entering into a contest with the West and China for influence over Mogadishu, Moscow risked its stake in Addis Ababa. The real test for the Soviet leadership was the need to sustain the pressure coming from circles within the Ethiopian Imperial Court, close to the Western powers. On Moscow's part, this required a skilful manoeuvring between its strategic interests and ideological convictions.

## I. 2. The Russians and the Horn prior to the 1960s

Symbolically, Tsar Nicholas II's help offered to Emperor Menelik II, as well as the USSR's political support to Haile Selassie during the Italian occupation, are two key episodes in the pre-1960 period that formed the foundation for mutual respect and understanding. In both cases, Russia, and then the Soviet Union were guided by their own national interests, as Ethiopia was the fulcrum of Russian regional designs, aimed at its greatest adversaries. Similarly, the picture did not change radically in the 1950s when Washington sought to replace Britain in North-East Africa. The synthesis between the newly-emerging bi-polar Cold War setting and the growing number of local and regional developments, further intensified Moscow's commitment to maintain and extend its influence in the Horn.

## I. 2.1 Russia and Menelik II

By the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial division of Africa between Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, had been completed. Italy found it unfair that it was not included in the partition of the continent and at the end of 1880s, Rome moved to Somalia and Eritrea. At the same time Ethiopia's ruler, Menelik II, successfully united the fragmented principalities of the country in a single centralised state. Naturally, a stronger Ethiopia was not favoured by those who sought to lay their hands on it. England and Italy were the most active colonial powers who purposefully acted in safeguarding their regional interests. Britain sought to capture the area, separating the colony of Uganda from London-controlled Sudan in order to unite its zones of influence from the Mediterranean Sea to the Cape of Good Hope. Rome, for its part, went on to use force in Ethiopia and in July 1894 occupied Kassala, thereby initiating the Italian-Abyssinian War, which ended ignominiously with defeat for Italy at Adwa on 1 March 1896.

St Petersburg supported Menelik II in his struggle against Italy. A strong, independent, and united Ethiopia restricted the freedom of action of the British in Africa, weakening their position on the sea routes leading to the Suez and the Red Sea.<sup>108</sup> On 9 February 1899 St Petersburg's Foreign Minister, Count Nikolai Murav'ev, expressed Russia's intention to prevent 'the dismemberment of Ethiopia,' as it 'hardly agree[d] with our own interests.'<sup>109</sup> As a major adversary of Tsarist Russia in the Middle East and Africa, Britain's colonial interests clashed with Russia's foreign policy, which aimed to derail London wherever possible.<sup>110</sup> Since it was virtually unattainable for Russia's autocracy to establish itself in the Muslim part of the North-East Africa, in the Horn, only

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<sup>108</sup> I. Katsnel'son, 'Gusar A. K. Bulatovich, voennŭi sovetnik negusa Éfiopii, zemleprokhodets, ieromonakh,' *Voенно-Istoricheskiĭ Zhurnal*, no. 7 (2002): 53-4.

<sup>109</sup> Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiĭskoĭ Imperii, f(ond) Politarkhiv, op(is) 482, d(elo) 47, l(ist) 45, cited in A. Khrenkov, 'Rossiya-Éfiopiya: Sto let diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii,' *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*, no. 4 (1998): 54-5.

<sup>110</sup> Khrenkov, Op. cit., 54.

Ethiopia became St Petersburg's friend against Britain and its local ally, Italy.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, Menelik II was well aware that his country had rather limited internal resources and was thus interested in attracting foreign capital. However, while opening the door to external investments, the Emperor was wary of the presence of the three colonial powers at his country's borders: Britain, France, and Italy, which aimed to take advantage of any Ethiopian foreign or domestic difficulties. Therefore, Menelik preferred, primarily, to encourage investment from countries that did not border Ethiopia, such as Belgium, Austria-Hungary, Germany, the US, and Russia.<sup>112</sup>

### I.2.2 The interwar period

As a result, in 1897, Russia and Ethiopia agreed to establish diplomatic relations, and an emergency mission was despatched from St. Petersburg to Addis Ababa. In fact, in February 1898, the arrival of the Russian delegation marked the beginning of Russia's first diplomatic representation in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, between 1907 and 1913 the Russo-Ethiopian relations gradually declined as St Petersburg began to show less interest in African affairs. In 1907, Russia concluded an agreement with Britain on the division of spheres of influence in Persia, Afghanistan, and China. Significantly curtailed were the costs of maintaining the mission to Ethiopia and representation was downgraded to 'chargé' status. After the 1917 Revolution, diplomatic relations between Russia and Ethiopia were suspended as Ethiopia, allied with the Entente, refused to accept representatives from Soviet Russia.<sup>114</sup> From the mid-1920s, Ethiopian ruling circles began to speak out for the restoration of relations with Soviet Russia. In April

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<sup>111</sup> K. Vinogradova, *Problem̄y voenno-politicheskogo i kul'turno-religioznogo vzaimodeĭstviya Ėfiopii i Rossii v novoe vremya*, (Avtoreferat, Krasnodar, 2002), 29.

<sup>112</sup> Khrenkov, 'Rossiya-Ėfiopiya,' 58.

<sup>113</sup> A. Davidson, 'Afrika v Istorii Rossii (opȳt trekh stoletii),' in *Istoricheskaya nauka na rubezhe vekov*, ed. A. Fursenko (Moskva: Nauka, 2001), 148.

<sup>114</sup> Khrenkov, *Op. cit.*, 58-9.

1924, the Prince Regent, Tafari Makonnen,<sup>115</sup> went on a diplomatic mission to Europe. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Georgii Chicherin, recommended that the Soviet representatives in the Great Britain, Italy, and Greece entered into contact with him. However, British and Italian rulers did everything to prevent this from happening.<sup>116</sup>

### I. 2.3 Soviet Union and Italian aggression

In 1935-6, during Soviet-Ethiopian negotiations on the establishment of formal relations in Moscow and Paris, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia caused the talks to be abandoned. While, Soviet diplomacy sought to support Ethiopia's struggle against Rome's aggression in the League of Nations,<sup>117</sup> Moscow's position on the Italian occupation was to be seen in a wider context. While Soviet diplomacy towards Rome aimed to prevent Italo-German rapprochement, in the League of Nations, Moscow once again demonstrated its profound distrust of British policy and the need to restrain France. In addition, the Soviet Union, as a state whose foreign policy centred on the principles of 'collective security,' the outbreak of a general war, or even the possibility of engaging in a local war 'on the outskirts of the world,' needed to act with even greater prudence and coolness.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The future Emperor Haile Selassie I.

<sup>116</sup> D. Makeev, 'Sovetsko-Éfiopskie otnosheniya v 20-30-e godý,' *Narodý Azii i Afriki*, no. 5 (1975): 139-45.

<sup>117</sup> A. Gromyko, *Afrika: Progress, trudnosti, perspektivý* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnýe otnosheniya, 1981), 128.

<sup>118</sup> G. Procacci, *Il Socialismo Internazionale e la Guerra d'Etiochia* (Roma: Editori Ruiniti, 1978), 152.

### I. 3. Establishing diplomatic relations

On 21 April 1943, a new phase in Russo-Ethiopian relations began when, on Ethiopia's initiative, diplomatic relations between Moscow and Addis Ababa were established.<sup>119</sup> The Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan Maiski signed an agreement on establishing diplomatic relations with the Ethiopian Negus.<sup>120</sup> One of Moscow's first acts after establishing diplomatic relations with Addis Ababa was to bring the former Russian hospital in Addis Ababa back to life. Following Italy's declarations of the protectorate over Abyssinia in the early 1896, the Tsarist government sent a Russian Red Cross detachment, allocating for this purpose, 100,000 Roubles. The Russian delegation consisted of experienced physicians, mostly graduates of St Petersburg Military Medical Academy. When the Red Cross brigade completed its work, Menelik II appealed to Tsar Nicholas II with a request to send more doctors,<sup>121</sup> thereby forming the Russian hospital in Addis Ababa which was to be closed in 1906, due to the complex political and economic situation in Russia. In September 1947, immediately after the establishment of the Soviet mission, Haile Selassie asked the Soviet leadership to make arrangements for a new hospital in Addis Ababa. It was named in honour of the Ethiopian national hero Dejazmach Balcha, a participant in the 1896 war against the Italians who died not far from the location of the clinic.<sup>122</sup>

The opening of the hospital soon provoked widespread rumours, amongst the diplomatic community, that it acted as a distribution centre for communist propaganda in Ethiopia, serving as an instrument in establishing Soviet influence in the country. According to the Egyptian newspaper, *Al Misri*, the Russians had embarked on an effort

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<sup>119</sup> E. Kartseva, *Formirovanie i razvitie sovetsko-éfiopskikh otnoshenii v 1974-1991 gg* (PhD Thesis, Rossiiskii Universitet Druzhbĭ Narodov, 2008), 150.

<sup>120</sup> TASS, 4 August 1943, 'Ob ustanovlenii diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii mezhdū SSSR i Abissinieĭ,' G[osudarstvennĭi] A[rkhiv] R[ossiiskoi] F[ederatsii], f[ond] 4459, op[is] 27, d[elo] 1166, l[ist] 41.

<sup>121</sup> N. Nikolaev, *Russkaya Afrika* (Moskva: Veche, 2009), 296-7.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

to infiltrate Ethiopia by promoting a modern hospital, employing 21 doctors, who for political purposes were touring the country, gathering information, while pretending to conduct medical research. Ethiopia was thus seen as a potential ‘major base for the Russian espionage directed against the British colonies, as well as their large military base in East Africa.’<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, the British deemed the Soviet hospital’s propaganda distribution as benign, as none of it was covert. In addition, some Greek, Italian, and Armenian expatriates were suspected of harbouring communist ideas; yet, there was no evidence of any activity on their part.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, to the Western observer, since the mid-1950s, despite increased contacts with the Soviet Bloc, in Ethiopia, communism had managed to gain a little foothold.

### I. 3.1 The Fate of the former Italian colonies

The late 1940s also witnessed a momentous change in the international standing of the Horn. The presence of the colonial powers steadily gave way to that of the United States and the Soviet Union. While France maintained its presence in Djibouti, Italy, as a defeated country in the WWII, had lost its colonies of Eritrea and Southern Somalia. Great Britain, having played a key role in defeating Italy, found itself administering the former Italian colonies, while restoring the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie I, to his throne in 1941. Initially, London attempted to implement a regional rearrangement by preventing the return of Ethiopian control over the Ogaden and the Haud, creating at the same time a larger British-controlled Somalia.

In Eritrea, too, Britain envisaged an entirely different territorial settlement, offering the highlands to Ethiopia and the lowlands to the Sudan. Consequently, Haile

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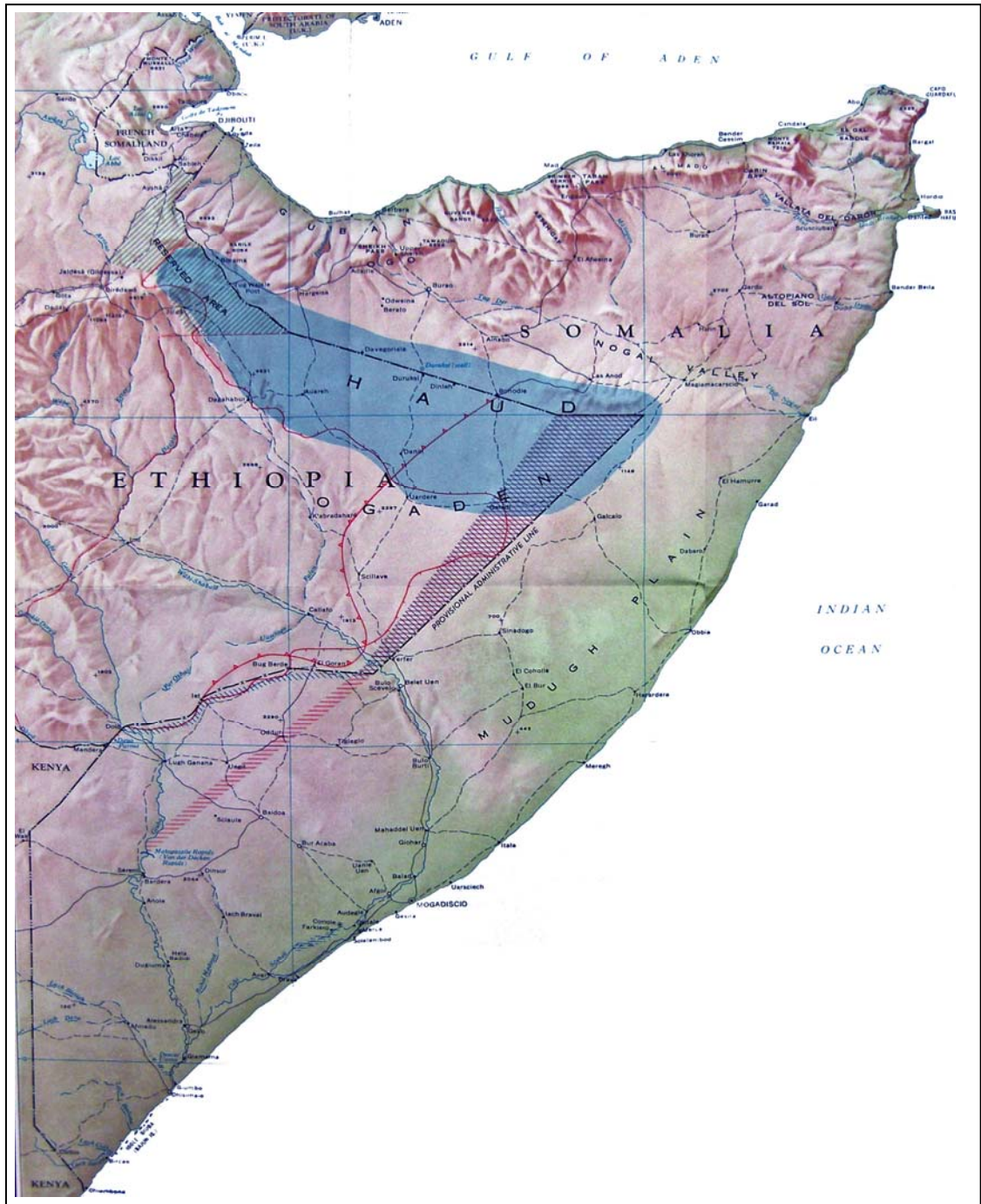
<sup>123</sup> TASS, 14 September 1948, ‘Antisovetskie izmýshleniya Egipetskoï gazetÿ,’ GARF, f. 4459, o. 27, d. 8855, ll. 21-2.

<sup>124</sup> J. Killick, 9 September 1955, T[he] N[ational] A[rchives], FO 1110/760, fo[lio] 1.

Selassie perceived London's regional policy as a threat to Ethiopia's sovereignty and started looking for other allies.<sup>125</sup> Looking to the East was one of the possibilities for the Ethiopian ruler. At first, Moscow advocated the transfer of the former colonies under Italian auspices on condition that they would later be granted independence. The Kremlin then performed a complete about-turn, defending immediate independence for Eritrea. Naturally, both provisions opposed Ethiopia's territorial designs and were met by Addis Ababa's dissatisfaction.

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. H. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) and M. Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1982).



**Map 1:** The Ogaden and the Haud regions of the Horn of Africa<sup>126</sup>

In 1947-8 Ethiopia launched a vigorous propaganda campaign on the future constitutional status of the formerly Italian-administered Red Sea province of Eritrea. Ethiopia's official press published interviews with the Emperor and other high

<sup>126</sup> Map source: NACP, RG59, CFP 1967-1969, Political and Defense, b. 2076, POL ETH-A to POL 33-1 ETH-SOMALI, f. POL 32-1, ETH-SOMALI.

dignitaries, which argued for Addis Ababa's historical right to the Eritrean territory. Media statements demanded that Ethiopia not allow the return of the Italians into the territory, as they had repeatedly used it as a base against Ethiopia. Significant attention was also given to Moscow's position, which the Imperial authorities regarded as harmful to Ethiopia's interests. The Kremlin's policy on the thorny issue changed several times in 1949-50. From the start, Moscow advocated the transfer of the former Italian colonies under Italian tutelage on condition that, after some time, they would be given the opportunity to become independent.<sup>127</sup> On 7 November 1949, the Soviet delegate to the UN declared that Moscow recognised the people's right to self-determination. Therefore, the Kremlin proposed granting independence to all three colonies: in the case of Libya – immediately; for Eritrea and Somalia – in five years.<sup>128</sup>

In the following year, however, the Soviet Union suggested the immediate granting of independence to Eritrea and the removal of British occupation forces. In explaining the Soviet about-turn regarding the Eritrean question, Soviet UN delegate, Arutyunyan posited that the Ethiopia's claims against the former Italian colony ran against the people's right to independence and self-determination. However, the Soviet Union recognised some of Addis Ababa's demands as justified and sought to grant Ethiopia access to the Red Sea through the port of Assab.<sup>129</sup> Despite that, the Soviet's nuanced approach towards the Eritrean issue was met with strong disapproval in Ethiopia. Consequently, the report on the work of the VOKS' representative in 1948 cast light on the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Addis Ababa. The report stated that Ethiopia's elite had been unsympathetic to the Soviet Union as it had counted on the Kremlin's support against Eritrean and Somali claims. As Ethiopian radio and

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<sup>127</sup> A. Davidson et al, *SSSR i Afrika* (Moskva: RAN, 2002), 99.

<sup>128</sup> TASS, 8 November 1949, 'V politicheskom komitete general'noĭ assamblei OON,' GARF, f. 4459, o. 27, d. 10481, ll. 100-1.

<sup>129</sup> TASS, 10 November 1950, 'Utrennee zasedanie special'nogo politicheskogo komiteta general'nom assamblei OON, 9 noyabrya,' GARF, f. 4459, o. 27, d. 12296, ll. 106-9.

press announcements were exclusively based on Western news reports, they reported international events with a marked anti-Soviet tint.<sup>130</sup>

Consequently, the Emperor chose to encourage Washington's interest in his country. In 1952, the new relationship yielded an agreement on technical assistance, followed in May 1953 by a military pact and a treaty, governing a 25-year lease over an Italian communications installation, Asmara, later renamed 'Kagnew Station.'<sup>131</sup> By the mid-1950s, it became one of the Pentagon's 'most important radio facilities in the world' and 'the greatest factor in security in the whole area.'<sup>132</sup> The US determination to expanding Ethiopian-American relations helped the Emperor to obtain control over Eritrea. In return, he demonstrated continuing commitment to the Western concept of collective security by sending Ethiopian soldiers to Korea. Haile Selassie's pro-Western statements led the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to include Ethiopia in his southern tier strategy for keeping the Middle East free of Soviet influence.<sup>133</sup>

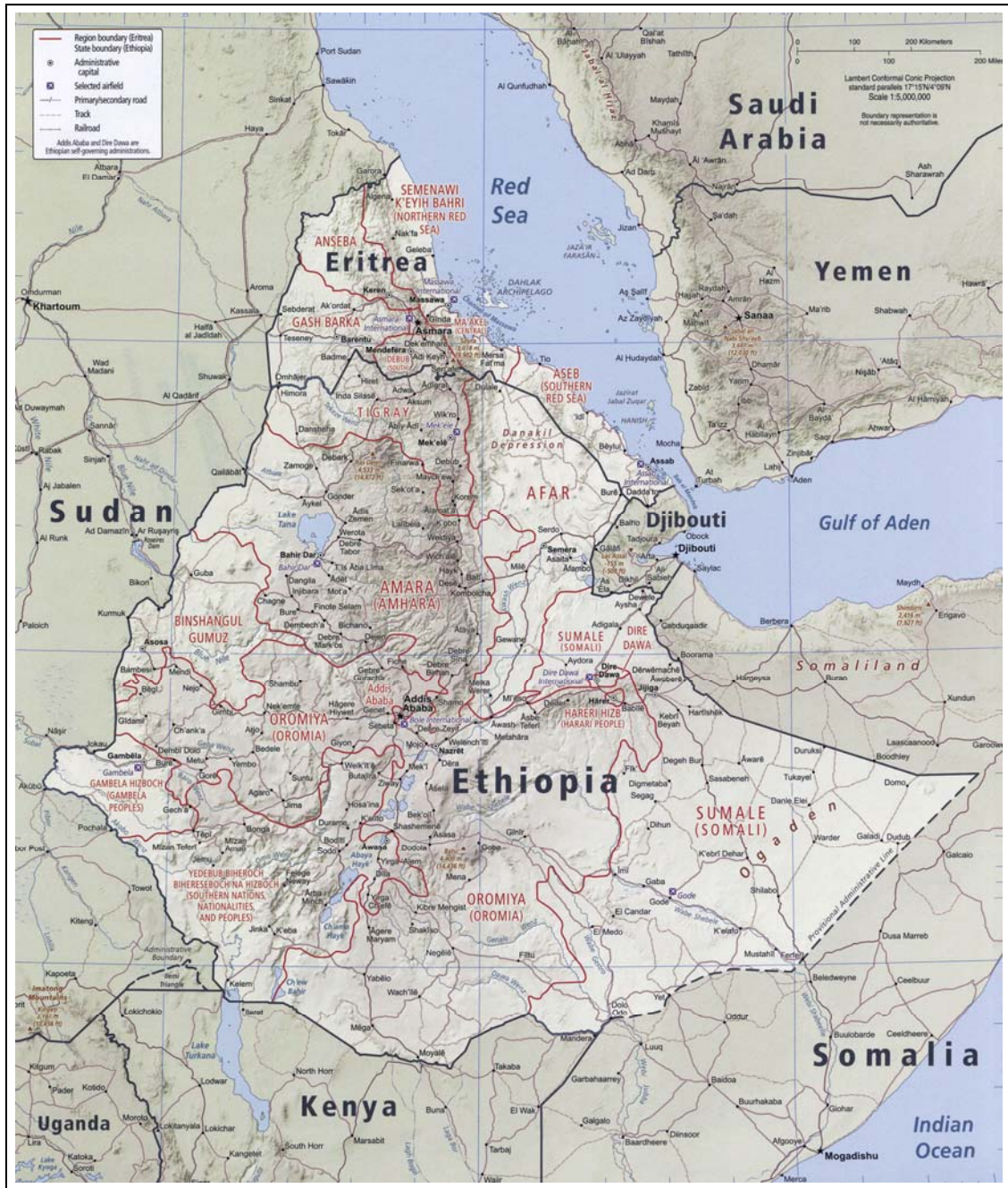
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<sup>130</sup> A[rkhiv] V[neshnei] P[olitiki] R[ossiiskoi] F[ederatsii], f. 0143, op. 8, p. 10, d. 19, l. 28-29, cited in Davidson et al, *SSSR I Afrika*, 99ff.

<sup>131</sup> J. Rasmuson, *A History of Kagnew Station and American Forces in Eritrea* (Arlington: US Army Security Agency, 1973), 48-9. See also NSSM 133 Study, 11 November 1975, National Security Archive (NSA), b(ox) 3, Ethiopia Collection (Terrence Lyons Donation), f[older] Horn of Africa: Study Pursuant to NSSM 184.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with H. Torbert, 31 August 1988, L[ibrary] o[f] C[ongress], A[ssociation] for D[iplomatic] S[tudies] and T[raining] Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>133</sup> Cf. F. Halliday, 'US Policy in the Horn of Africa,' *Review of African Political Economy*, no 10 (1977): 10ff.



**Map 2:** Ethiopia and the Eritrean province.<sup>134</sup>

### I. 3.2 East-West competition in Ethiopia

In the late-1950s, at the height of the Cold War Moscow came to show an increased interest in Africa and launched actions to enhance its presence in the newly liberated

<sup>134</sup> Map source: University of Texas at Austin, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection Online, URL: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/eritrea\\_ethiopia\\_2009.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/eritrea_ethiopia_2009.jpg).

states. While, initially, only Western powers were present in Ethiopia, with the introduction of the Soviet Bloc's interest in the region, external powers' activities in Ethiopia became increasingly polarised. Certain powers' influence, such as that of Britain and Italy, had declined to the benefit of the United States and the Soviet Union. This gradually turned Ethiopia and the Horn into a local theatre in the international struggle of the two opposed blocs.<sup>135</sup> While the Russians took the lead in enhancing the influence of the Socialist-bloc in Ethiopia, their East European allies were no less active in Addis Ababa. Accordingly, under Soviet direction, from the mid-1950s, the East's role in the field of trade came to occupy a more prominent place in its local activism. In early May 1956, Mikael Kabede, the Ethiopian minister for economic development, sounded Prague's diplomats out about Ethiopian interest in the supply of production equipment from Czechoslovakia. Among other things, Addis Ababa intended to expand the existing munitions factory, built in 1946-9, using Czechoslovak expertise. Prague characterised Ethiopian interest as part of the Emperor's plan to reduce American economic and political influence in the country.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, by aiming to reduce Ethiopia's economic dependence on the West, Soviet envoys actively sought to recruit the assistance of their bloc allies. Along with the elevation of the Soviet legation into an embassy, a resident minister took charge of the Czech Legation.<sup>137</sup> Such steps were also taken by Sofia. On 25 November 1955, the Soviet chargé, Pasyutin, advised his Czechoslovakian counterpart that Prague's diplomats would need to focus on developing business contacts with Ethiopian firms, while keeping

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<sup>135</sup> Cable, Addis Ababa to Belgrade, 10 November 1960, D[iplomatski] A[rhiv] M[inistarstvo] S[poljnih] P[oslove] R[epublike] S[rbije], f[ond] P[olitički] A[rhiv], Etiopija 1960, f[ascikle] 26, s[ignatura] 44353, s[trana] 1.

<sup>136</sup> 'Zpráva pro politické byrů ÚV KSČ o možnosti dodávek zařízení na výrobu pušek a ručních granátů do Etiopie,' 2 August 1956, N[árodní] A[rchiv] Č[eské] R[epubliky], f[ond] KSC-UV-02/2, sv[azek] 112, a[rch.]j[ednotka]/b[od] 132/10, s[trana] 1.

<sup>137</sup> G. Furlonge [on Soviet activities in Ethiopia], 12 June 1957, TNA, FO 371/125360, fo. 12-3.

their eyes open for any provocation coming from the West.<sup>138</sup> Pasyutin's successor, Karavaev, continued to encourage Czechoslovak trade activities. He was confident that Prague had an excellent opportunity to enhance economic and political relations with Addis Ababa, owing to the traditionally good relations between the two states, developed during the Italian aggression. Again, hindrances extended by the Americans were to be factored in when planning and implementing assistance projects.<sup>139</sup> However, while Moscow left the commercial side to its European allies, in the mid-1950s, the Russians concluded an important deal. The Soviets bought over a thousand tonnes of Ethiopian coffee, thus joining Washington in the important battle for Addis Ababa's coffee export. Immediately, in accordance with the bi-polar international order, this deal prompted speculation that it was part of Moscow's plan to form a 'coffee-cotton axis' in the North-East Africa.<sup>140</sup>

Understandably, with the simultaneous expansion of American interest in Ethiopia, the potential threat of communist penetration into the Horn began to receive more attention in the West. In 1958, as a CIA operative based in Addis Ababa stated, the Agency tapped the Soviet, Czechoslovakian, and Egyptian embassies' telephones in a campaign directed against the Russians in Ethiopia.<sup>141</sup> At that time, Washington saw economic warfare as a critical part of the emerging Cold War struggle - not only in Europe, but also in underdeveloped countries with assumed strategic value.<sup>142</sup> Soviet assessment of American

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<sup>138</sup> 'Záznam o návštěvě u sovětského chargé d'affaires,' 9. December 1955, A[rchiv] M[inisterstvo] Z[ahraniční] V[ece], f[ond] T[eritoriální] O[dbory] – T[ajné] 1955-59, k[rabice] Etiopie 1, sv[azek] 212/212, s[trana] 1.

<sup>139</sup> 'Záznam ze zdvořilostní návštěvy u velvyslance SSSR B. I. Karavajeva dne 31. prosince 1956,' 15 February 1957, AMZV, f. TO – O[byčejné] 1945-59, k. 1, sv. 212/151, s. 1.

<sup>140</sup> G. Furlonge, TNA, FO 371/125360, fo. 13.

<sup>141</sup> Although this operation did not seem to have a high priority, the American Embassy in Addis Ababa had a bespoke 'CIA wing,' where a number of officers spent days translating and transcribing material from eavesdropping activities. See Interview with H. Imbrey, 21 June 2001, LoC, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>142</sup> M. Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress* (Princeton: PUP, 2001), 98–9, cited by A. McVety, 'Pursuing Progress,' *Diplomatic History* 32, no 3 (2008): 376.

economic penetration into Ethiopia bore similar connotations.<sup>143</sup> To that end, in the eyes of the Soviet observers, the US\$8m in loans, extended by the US-led International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for improving Ethiopia's communication and road infrastructure, offered the 'American imperialists' a way in to the country via the despatch of various technical specialists. These actions suggested to Moscow that Washington aimed to engage Addis Ababa as a key link in an East African system of front-line naval supply bases. Ultimately, this strategy attempted to turn Haile Selassie's feudal fiefdom into a military base to be used in the event of war against the Soviet Union.<sup>144</sup>

#### I. 4. Haile Selassie and the Kremlin

While by 1951, Stalin had slowly begun to consider how Soviet authority could be increased in the former colonies, it was Khrushchev's rise to power that prompted the Kremlin to recognise the opportunities represented by the process of decolonisation.<sup>145</sup> He saw no inherent contradiction in actively searching for new allies in the Third World, while reducing military tensions with the West. Moscow had to move to the East; great-power politics had to become global. The beginning of the collapse of the colonial system, the first visible manifestation of which was the Bandung Conference in 1955, was seen by the Kremlin as a transformation of the colonial world from a solid rear-guard of imperialism into its weakest spot.<sup>146</sup> Moscow's Ambassador to London, Ivan Maiski,

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<sup>143</sup> The Soviets believed Ethiopia to be a potentially rich country which added value to its strategic location. Soviet academician Vavilov claimed that Ethiopia was one of the eight richest in terms of agricultural resources in the world and with proper development it could feed half of Europe or the entire Middle East, see M. Kruglov, 'Drevnyaya strana molodoi Afriki,' *Novoe Vremya*, no. 10, 3 (1967): 25-6.

<sup>144</sup> TASS, 'Amerikantsy prevrashchayut Efiopiyu v svoyu voennuyu bazu,' 13 July 1951, GARF, f. 4459, op. 27, d. 13155, l. 11.

<sup>145</sup> M. Light, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy in the Third World,' in *Troubled Friendships*, ed. M. Light (London: British Academy Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>146</sup> S. Mazov, *Politika SSSR v Zapadnoi Afrike 1956-1964* (Moskva: Nauka, 2008), 10.

in a personal letter to Khrushchev and Bulganin on 22 December 1955 shared his opinion:

‘[S]truggle for world supremacy of socialism will go through the emancipation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples against imperialist exploitation. [...], [T]he imperialist powers’ loss of their colonies should accelerate the victory of socialism in Europe and ultimately, the United States.’<sup>147</sup>

In 1955, the belief in the viability of a national-liberation movement motivated Khrushchev to promote arms agreements and extend economic assistance to the first generation of African leaders without regard for their political affiliation.<sup>148</sup> Until the early 1960s, however, the programme of international solidarity with newly independent states showed little success. The leaders turned out to be more nationalistic than progressive.<sup>149</sup> In the late 1950s, while Khrushchev’s foreign policy concerns were primarily Berlin and disarmament, a second wave of national liberation reshaped the map of Africa. In July 1960, Somalia was granted independence. Almost immediately, Moscow sought to establish contacts with the new state. Simultaneously, Ethiopian-Soviet relations entered a new stage, manifested by Moscow’s provision to Addis Ababa of the largest credit given to a sub-Saharan African nation at the time.

#### I. 4.1 Ethiopian-US friction and the Emperor’s turn to the East

In the mid-1950s, Moscow benefited from growing tension in Ethiopian-American relations, caused by Washington’s approach to Cairo, prior to the Suez Crisis. The chain of events was triggered by the September 1955 Czechoslovak-Egypt arms deal. In December, in an attempt to reclaim its position, Washington offered Cairo financial assistance for the construction of the Aswan Dam without consulting Addis Ababa. Since

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<sup>147</sup> Maiski quoted by Mazov, *Op. cit.*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> A. Fursenko and T. Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 282.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

the Blue Nile, originating from Ethiopia was the prime source for the waters of the Lower Nile, the Imperial Regime felt greatly insulted by the American actions. By July 1956, anti-communist pressures caused the US to withdraw the promised assistance for the dam. Consequently, two weeks later, Nasser retaliated by nationalising the Suez Canal. Following the closure of the Canal, coffee, the mainstay of Ethiopia's foreign exchange earnings, had to be shipped via the Cape of Good Hope. This negatively impacted Ethiopia's terms of trade.<sup>150</sup> The decline in the price of coffee, together with increased imports, resulted in a trade deficit of US\$17m and depleted Ethiopia's foreign exchange reserves. Finally, in the autumn of 1958, the US turned a deaf ear to Addis Ababa's request for a US\$50m loan.<sup>151</sup>

Following Haile Selassie's disappointment with Washington's regional policies, Addis Ababa adopted a noticeable neutralist tint in its foreign affairs. The Emperor's keen interest in attracting foreign investments set the pace and direction for the subsequent intensification of socialist activities in Ethiopia. By the end of the 1950s, various cultural, political, and economic delegations sent by Moscow's European allies aimed to improve the Soviet Bloc's image and reliability as a potential international backer. Moreover, in addition to accepting trade missions from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, the reception of a big theatrical troupe from China and a 30-day visit by Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, exemplified the Emperor's strategy to attract a wider foreign interest in his country.<sup>152</sup>

The Bloc's advances into Ethiopia were monitored by Washington and further exacerbated superpower competition in the country. In order to preserve, and potentially enlarge, America's stake in Ethiopia, in March 1957, Vice-President Nixon arrived in

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<sup>150</sup> J. Spenser, *Ethiopia at Bay* (Algonac: Reference Publications, 1984), 287-90.

<sup>151</sup> 'Brief on Ethiopia,' September 1960, CIA Office of Research and Reports, N[ational] A[rchives] at C[ollege] P[ark], CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA/RR GP 60-105:L; ESDN: CIA-RDP63-00314R000200160030-2L.

<sup>152</sup> H. Bigart, 'US is Regaining Ethiopia's Favor,' *The New York Times*, 18 February 1957, 5.

Addis Ababa to seek additional acreage for the expansion of the Kagnev station. The Russians learned of Nixon's request even before the latter had made it. In a reactive move to America's potentially offensive local plans, the first secretary of the Soviet embassy hinted to Haile Selassie that US bases in Ethiopia might be attacked in the event of a war, which could result in a nuclear fall-out on Ethiopia. Then, during the reception given in Nixon's honour, the Soviet ambassador sounded out the Emperor that Ethiopia could have Soviet arms 'any time she wanted them.'<sup>153</sup>

However, the most serious cause for disaffection between Ethiopia and the United States came through Washington's stance on the emerging Somaliland problem. With approaching independence, the Somali leaders had launched a public campaign for the unification of all Somali territories, including French Djibouti, northern Kenya, and the Ethiopian Ogaden region in one state. As early as March 1958, the United States assumed the lead in arranging financial options for the soon-to-be independent country. Talks were opened with Italy, Britain, and France, for which Ethiopia was not consulted. On 12 January 1959, the US Ambassador, Don Bliss, presented a note to the Ethiopian government in which he urged the acceptance of a union between British and Italian Somaliland, thereby initiating, in the eyes of the Imperial Regime, the first step towards the creation of a Greater Somalia. This, allegedly, opened the 'gate on the long road for communist domination in Ethiopia.'<sup>154</sup> As a result, as in the earlier case of Eritrea, Haile Selassie launched a search for international support for his new cause. This time, the Western plans prompted the Emperor to distance himself from the capitalist camp by embarking on a long trip to Egypt, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. The centrepiece in Haile Selassie's shuttle diplomacy was his visit to the Soviet Union; a trip which was set to play a crucial role in the future of Soviet-Ethiopian relations.

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<sup>153</sup> Spenser, *Ethiopia at Bay*, 290-1.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

## I. 4.2 The Emperor goes to Moscow

Soviet policy circles saw the disintegration of the colonial system as the second phase of the general crisis of capitalism, following the WWII.<sup>155</sup> A significant episode in this process was the Bandung conference of Asian and African states in 1955, where independent African countries for the first time in their history participated in an international forum, discussing critical international issues. Bandung aimed to shift the focus away from the East-West divide, and leaders throughout Africa and Asia believed that their national interests would be served best by staying clear of the Cold War, which made finding allies in the periphery more valuable than ever before.<sup>156</sup> This created a greater incentive for the Soviet Union and its European allies to search for opportunities to engage the non-aligned states. The increase in Soviet attention to Ethiopia coincided with the rise of national liberation movements in the Middle East and Africa which were seen as potential partners in the anti-imperialist struggle.

In this historical setting, Ethiopia, owing to its strategic location and close relations with the Kremlin's adversaries in the Cold War, seemed a convenient place to monitor the changing environment in the Horn. The Kremlin saw Ethiopia not just as an 'American puppet,' but also as a state which prioritised its own national interests, and as a potentially influential actor among the emerging African countries.<sup>157</sup> Accordingly, Moscow perceived Addis Ababa to be one of the stalwarts in the newly formed non-aligned movement, and expected it to play a vital role on the wider international scene.

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<sup>155</sup> I. Potekhin, 'Kharakternye cherty raspada kolonial'noi sistem̄ imperializma v Afrike,' *Problemy Vostokovedeniya*, no. 1 (1960): 12-29.

<sup>156</sup> C. Fraser, 'Race and Realpolitik,' in *Window on Freedom*, ed. B. Plummer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 118; J. Parker, 'Cold War II: The Eisenhower Administration, the Bandung Conference, and the Reperiodization of the Postwar Era,' *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 5 (2006), cited in McVety, 'Pursuing Progress,' 396-7.

<sup>157</sup> S. Sinitsyn, *Missiya v Ėfiopii* (Moskva: Institut Afriki RAN, 2000), 13-4.

At the end of the 1950s, Ethiopian-Soviet relations reached a qualitatively new level. In February 1959, the possibility of the association between the British and the ex-Italian Somali colonies provided further ammunition for the Emperor's advisers who advocated closer relations with the Soviet Bloc.<sup>158</sup> The Emperor's initial hesitation to accept the invitation from the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, Kliment Voroshilov, in 1956 was overcome by the deterioration in Ethiopian-US relations over the fate of Somalia. In June 1959, Haile Selassie embarked upon a visit to the Soviet Union. The Emperor sought to secure Moscow's political support for Ethiopia's integrity, thereby curbing the 'Anglo-American plan' that called for the creation of 'Greater Somalia.' According to Soviet observers, Haile Selassie was determined to gain Soviet economic assistance, through which to exert pressure on Washington.<sup>159</sup> The Emperor's visit to the USSR received wide attention in Addis Ababa, and, upon their return, many of Ethiopia's high-ranking officials expressed their satisfaction with what they had seen during their trip.

The visit marked a significant landmark in the relations between the two countries. Haile Selassie was the first African leader to visit the Soviet Union, receiving one of its highest military decorations, the Order of Suvorov.<sup>160</sup> The Emperor spent two weeks touring the country, inspecting industrial sites and irrigation projects that demonstrated Soviet technical prowess and ability to help Ethiopia along its path of industrial and agricultural progress. Later, he spoke of the 'industry and diligence of the Soviet people' and praised the USSR as 'the world's greatest power.' In return, Haile

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<sup>158</sup> J[oint] I[n]telligence B[ulletin], 'Ethiopia: Economic Agreement with the USSR,' 26 August 1959, E.I.G. (59) 13 (Final), TNA, FO 371/138065, fo. 2.

<sup>159</sup> 'Návštěva etiopského císaře v ČSR,' 3 May 1959, NAČR, f KSC-UV-02/2, sv 217, aj/b: 295/9, ss. 1-2; similar assessment is given by the British Embassy in Moscow on 18 July 1959, see TNA, FO 371/138032, fo. 29 (2); See also Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 93, and C[urrent] I[n]telligence W[EEKLY] S[UMMARY], 'Ethiopian Relations With US May Deteriorate,' 27 August 1959; NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79-00927A002400040001-2.

<sup>160</sup> C. McLane, *Soviet – Third World Relations* (London: Centre for Central Asian Relations, 1973), 42.

Selassie was praised as representative not only of Ethiopia, but also of ‘the whole African liberation movement,’<sup>161</sup> by taking the side of the African peoples in their struggle for liberation.<sup>162</sup> In Voroshilov’s words, the Kremlin appreciated not only Haile Selassie’s outstanding efforts in strengthening the Ethiopian independence and development, but also his protection of the national interests of the peoples of Africa.<sup>163</sup> Khrushchev, for his part, declared that although the Soviets ‘did not have any special interests in Ethiopia, as in other countries,’ they wanted an independent and prosperous Ethiopia ‘that plays an important role in Africa.’<sup>164</sup>

With Somali independence imminent, Haile Selassie’s visit to the Soviet Union proved a success in obtaining the political support needed for the inviolability of Ethiopian borders. Moscow, for its part, extended political and economic support in a bid to hamper Western penetration and strengthen the Kremlin’s position in the country.<sup>165</sup> In his speech at a reception in the Kremlin, on 11 July Khrushchev declared that ‘[t]here are forces which are trying to exploit territorial differences between the peoples of Africa to create the conditions for preserving colonialism in that area.’ He added that it was the Soviet Government’s ‘deep conviction’ that all territorial problems should be solved peacefully, in conformity with United Nations’ Charter.<sup>166</sup>

The high point of the visit was the signing of an agreement on a 400 million-rouble loan – at the time the largest credit given by Moscow to a Sub-Saharan African country.<sup>167</sup> Ethiopia’s reasons for accepting the loan were largely economic. During the late-1950s, there was a growing realisation among Ethiopia’s ruling circles that economic

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<sup>161</sup> S. Yakobson, ‘The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,’ *Review of Politics* 25, no. 3 (1963): 335.

<sup>162</sup> Yu. Tomilin, ‘Za druzhbu mezhdru SSSR i Ėfiopieĭ,’ *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, no. 7 (1959): 117-8.

<sup>163</sup> See K. Voroshilov’s speech in *Pravda*, 1 June 1959, 2.

<sup>164</sup> TASS, 29 January 1961, ‘Agenstvo France Press o poezdke V. S. Semenova v Addis-Abebu,’ GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 438, l. 59.

<sup>165</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 96-7.

<sup>166</sup> British Embassy Moscow, FO 371/138032, fo. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Yakobson, ‘The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,’ 335.

backwardness severely limited the country's chances to increase its prestige amongst the newly independent African states. This increased the demand for rapid development. Influenced by the current trend of Afro-Asian thinking, Ethiopia moved towards a policy of non-alignment<sup>168</sup> by attracting economic support from as many sources as possible. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, extended the credit for political reasons. After its failure to persuade Khartoum to accept large-scale aid, Moscow welcomed the opportunity for further penetration into Africa by extending its influence in the Nile Valley.<sup>169</sup> In the final analysis, on a wider international scale, the credit-line was also symptomatic of the evolution of Soviet attitudes towards Africa. In extending the line of credit, Moscow aimed to attract interest from other African nations, strengthening the impression within the Afro-Asian movement of the Kremlin's resolve to reduce the tensions between the nations in favour of the principles of peaceful coexistence.<sup>170</sup>

Last but not least, the Emperor's visit to the Soviet Union contributed further to developing mutual relations and aimed to increase the USSR's popularity in Ethiopia. In addition, the trip also accounted for a major turn in Ethiopian officials' attitude towards the Soviet Union. Upon his return from Moscow, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Aklilou Habte-Wold, shared with American diplomats his perception 'that there was real personal liberty in the Soviet Union' and contrary to his prior experience in dealing with Soviet officials, all the people he met on the trip 'had been free and easy in their conversations.' He was confident that Stalin's death had changed the country's political ethos, and was convinced that Soviets wanted peace.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> 'Ethiopia: Economic Agreement with the USSR,' 26 August 1959, EIG (59) 13 (Final), FO 371/138065, fo. 2.

<sup>169</sup> EIG (59) 13 (Final), fo. 2.

<sup>170</sup> 'Návštěva etiopského císaře v ČSR,' NAČR, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Cable, Addis Ababa to Secretary of State no. 165, 18 August 1959, NACP, R[ecord] G[rroup] 84, f[older] 320 – ETHIOPIA – USSR 1959 (C), b[ox] 9 - Addis Ababa CGR 1959-1961.

### I. 4.3 Soviet attempts at economic penetration

Moscow's efforts to develop and strengthen its economic position in Ethiopia aimed to secure the Kremlin's presence in the Horn, while countering Western influence.<sup>172</sup> These efforts also represented 'a significant step forward in the USSR's drive for influence in the underdeveloped world.'<sup>173</sup> The 400 million-Rouble credit provided a channel for what the West saw as Soviet penetration into Ethiopia requiring a response.<sup>174</sup> To the detriment of the US, the Soviets embarked upon several key economic proposals that seriously undermined Western interests. Moscow offered to supply jet aircrafts to the Ethiopian Airlines and to conduct minerals surveys, thus seeking to gain access to significant scientific information that would benefit the USSR's military interests.<sup>175</sup> At this stage, the Kremlin's calculations provided for the extension of high impact economic projects in a bid to curb White House initiatives and further build up a positive image as an international partner.

The provision of the 400 million-Rouble loan hinted at Moscow's ambitions of long-term engagement in Ethiopia. The Soviet Union and Ethiopia signed an agreement on the construction of a technical school in Bahr Dar for one thousand students as a gift from the Soviet government.<sup>176</sup> In response to Soviet advances, the United States attempted to challenge the Kremlin by increasing the levels of economic and military

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<sup>172</sup> V. Repić, 'Izvestaj o spoljno-politickoj aktivnosti Etiopije I bilateralnim odnosima FNRJ-Etiopija u 1961 godina,' 25 July 1962, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1962, fasc. 26, sig. 425402, s. 26.

<sup>173</sup> CIA Office of National Estimates, 'Implications of the Soviet-Ethiopian Aid Deal,' Memorandum for the Director, 1 September 1959, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79R00904A0005 00010038-7; See also 'Khrushchev Offers Aid, Friendship to Ethiopia,' *Africa Special Report*, no. 4 (1959).

<sup>174</sup> R. Stephens, 'Statements of Hans Heymann, Jr. on Soviet Penetration Techniques and Petroleum Polices,' 3 Mart 1960, NACP, RG59, Central Decimal File (CDF) 1960-63, b. 1365, f. 661.73/7-560. See also J. Satterthwaite and R. Terrill, 'US and Western Action to Counter Bloc Penetration of Ethiopia,' 29 February 1960, NACP, RG59, CDF 1960-63, b. 1365, f. 661.73/7-560.

<sup>175</sup> CIA Office of Research and Reports, 'Brief on Ethiopia,' September 1960, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP63-00314R000200160030-21.

<sup>176</sup> TASS, 28 March 1960, 'Krepnet sovetско-éfiopskoe sotrudnichestvo,' GARF, f. 4459, op. 27, d. 21459, l. 67.

assistance.<sup>177</sup> A telling example of superpower competitive bidding for Ethiopia's disposition was the construction of an oil refinery, planned initially during Haile Selassie's Moscow visit in 1959. According to local US embassy accounts this formed part of efforts to thwart Soviet efforts to penetrate the vital petroleum refinery and distribution fields in the country.<sup>178</sup> Bloc diplomats reported that the Americans had made an offer Addis Ababa to build a refinery of a much lesser capacity in exchange for land for another military base.<sup>179</sup> This reinvigorated Kremlin's resolve to complete the deal, and on 25 March 1960 an agreement was signed for the construction of a refinery in Assab.<sup>180</sup>

Both Moscow and Washington sought to improve their standing in Ethiopia, whose industrial backwardness justified their battle for influence through economic competition. Political developments at the end of 1960 prompted Moscow to reassess its tactics in Ethiopia.

## I. 5. The December Coup

In December 1960, an abortive coup against Haile Selassie engendered a shift in Soviet operational conduct. While it was unclear whether an external force stood behind the coup, Soviet representatives in Addis Ababa reported the Emperor's vulnerability and the formation of a group of young intellectuals highly critical to the regime. These developments prompted Moscow to re-evaluate the prospects for enhancing the tactical approach of providing assistance projects in conjunction with carefully executed

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<sup>177</sup> Addis Ababa to DSIP, 24 March 1961, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1961, fasc. 24, sig. 49321, s. 1.

<sup>178</sup> J. Sattethwaite, 'Proposal Intended to Block Soviet Construction of Petroleum Refinery in Ethiopia,' 26 February 1960, NACP, RG59, Lot Files (LF), b. 2, Bureau of African Affairs (AF), f. 4a US vs USSR-POL (SAFE) 60-1.

<sup>179</sup> A. Aleksiev, 2 July 1961, D[iplomatičeski] A[rkhiv], M[inisterstvo] na V[ü]n[shnite] R[aboti] - R[epublika] B[ülgariya], f(ond) - p[overitelen], op[is] 17, p[apka] 26, por[eden] 423, l[ist] 3, s[tranitsa] 3.

<sup>180</sup> Addis Ababa to Foreign Ministry, 'Soviet Aide Memoire,' 29 April 1961, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1961, fasc. 24, sig. 414437, s. 2.

propaganda activities. The latter, in the Western analysis, were thought of as being directed at securing a more favourable position for exploiting a potential revolution against the Emperor's feudal regime.

### I. 5.1 Influences and reactions

Favourable conditions for the spread of public discontent with the Imperial regime's policies began to gather momentum in Ethiopia's socio-political life towards the end of the 1950s. An increasing number of students attended educational institutions in Ethiopia or returned from abroad, especially from the United States. In Addis Ababa, a younger generation of 'semi-intellectuals' became increasingly dismayed with Haile Selassie's corrupted regime.<sup>181</sup> This tense situation prompted some officers in the Emperor's inner circles to attempt to overthrow him. The objective was to remove the ruling regime which was blamed for the economic stagnation of the country.<sup>182</sup>

On 13 December 1960, while Haile Selassie was on a visit to Brazil, the Commander-in-chief of the Imperial Bodyguard, Brigadier General Mengistu Neway, took control of the imperial palace, detaining the Crown Prince, Asfa-Wossen.<sup>183</sup> Mengistu was aided by his younger brother, Germame, a Western-educated governor of Jijiga. The Neway brothers were joined by the Chief of Security, the Deputy Minister of the Navy, and a few educated radicals, who were supported by most of the Imperial Bodyguard. On 14 December, the rebels secured control of most of Addis Ababa and drafted a proclamation,

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<sup>181</sup> J. Killick, 'On the possibilities of the development of Communism in Ethiopia,' 9 September 1955, TNA, FO 1110/760, fo. 1.

<sup>182</sup> 'Pokus o revoluci v Addis Abebě,' A[rchiv] B[ezpečnostních] S[ložek], f[ond] I. Správa SNB, sv[azek] 10595, s[trana] 113.

<sup>183</sup> This short overview of the December 1960 coup is based on C. Clapham, 'The Ethiopian Coup d'Etat of December 1960,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 4 (1968): 495-6, R. Greenfield, *Ethiopia: a new political history* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965): 337-452. For a detailed Soviet account on the events, see Sinitsyn, *Missiya v Éfiopii*, 127-40; the American perspective and role are discussed at length in Marcus, *Ethiopia*, 116-50.

broadcast by Asfa-Wossen, who allegedly acted under duress. The proclamation attacked Ethiopia's economic backwardness, announced the formation of a new government, headed by Asfa-Wossen, and sought the support of university students.

Later that day, the Soviet ambassador was invited to the Foreign Ministry. The Deputy Foreign Minister, Petros, made it clear that the new leadership wanted to cooperate with the Soviet Union and sought Moscow's recognition of the emerging government. Moscow lacked any intelligence as to who was behind the coup. The new leadership's public statements, as well as the information received from other embassies, showed that the Americans, while closely linked to the imperial regime, were not implicated, as originally thought by Socialist Bloc representatives.<sup>184</sup> Initially, Western diplomats blamed Moscow, although, as it transpired later, even for the Soviets these events were just as surprising as they were for the Western powers. Despite the lack of information about the forces behind the coup, the Soviet Embassy informed Moscow that the coup was likely to have been organised domestically. As the prospects for the new regime remained unclear, the local Soviet representatives proposed that the Kremlin refrain from recognising the new government.<sup>185</sup>

Helped by the Americans, the Emperor returned to Addis Ababa on 17 December, and defeated the rebels. However, the closing weeks of 1960 showed that the Ethiopian leader remained vulnerable to social discontent. This prompted many contemporary observers to scrutinise not only the Soviet Union's involvement in the Horn, but also its intentions and long-term plans. As it saw considerable revolutionary potential developing

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<sup>184</sup> According to Czechoslovak intelligence, the Americans did not approve of the Emperor's policies, which pursued positive neutrality and cooperation with African countries as they did not fit the US plans of turning Africa into part of their sphere of influence. From the outset, the Czechoslovaks believed that the forces that led to the December uprising were of pro-American character. One of the arrested participants in the revolt, the appointed Foreign Minister Petros, was known to have had a pro-American orientation. See 'Kdo stal za pučem v Etiopii,' ABS, f. I. Správa SNB, sv. 10595, ss. 82-4. See also Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 129-30; For a similar outline see A. Aleksiev, 'Otnosno prevrata protiv Haile Selasie izvürshena (sic) na 14 Dekemvri 1960,' 14 December 1960, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya[ven], op[is] 16, d[elo] 19, por[eden] 340, s[tranitsa] 5, l[ist] 5.

<sup>185</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 130-1.

in the country in the early 1960s, Moscow stepped up its propaganda activities in Addis Ababa.

### I. 5.2 Soviet propaganda following the coup

While the attempted coup surprised the Soviets as much as everyone else, during the first half of 1961 Moscow's objective seems to have shifted from an attempt to embark on a series of 'assistance' projects to that of positioning itself to exploit the next revolution, by means of enhanced propaganda.<sup>186</sup> Moscow faced an arduous task of tactful engagement. The Emperor became increasingly wary of admitting large numbers of Soviet specialists, and this created obstacles to the utilisation of the Soviet credit line. The Kremlin and bloc representatives, in return, had to demonstrate flexibility and willingness to exert soft power.

Consequently, the Soviet Union's contacts with Ethiopia, especially in terms of the 400-million Rouble loan did not yield the desired results. Up until the early 1960s, the loan remained almost unused, except for the construction of the refinery.<sup>187</sup> However, in the course of 1961, the Soviets increased their activity in the cultural and propaganda fields, concluding an agreement on cultural cooperation.<sup>188</sup> The Soviets also began publishing a daily information bulletin and continued to court leading press journalists. Personnel of Soviet Bloc embassies appeared to their American colleagues to be successful in developing contacts with young Ethiopians and university students. Although it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of such soft power moves, it

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<sup>186</sup> 'Sino-Soviet Bloc Politico-Economic Relations with Ethiopia, December 20, 1960 to May 10, 1961,' 11 May 1961, NACP, RG84, Addis Ababa CGR 1959-1961, b. 16, 510.1 TRADE W/SOVIET BLOC – 570.3 RELIGION 1961, f. 510.1 – TRADE W/SOVIET BLOC 1960 (C); see also Repić, 25 July 1962, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1962, fasc. 26, sig. 425402, s. 27.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Repić, 'Izvestaj o spoljno-politickoj aktivnosti Etiopije,' DAMSP-RS, s. 26.

<sup>188</sup> TASS, 8 December 1959, 'V Ėfiopii vozrastает interes k sovetскому soyuzu,' GARF, f. 4459, op. 27, d. 20486, l. 228.

gradually became clear that Bloc propaganda was having some effect upon Ethiopia's youth. For example, a secondary school student who went to the United States for the *Herald Tribune* Forum startled the staff at the American Embassy, when, upon his return to Ethiopia, he gave a talk at the US Information Service's mission in which he maintained that in America he encountered only limited freedom of speech.<sup>189</sup>

Domestic and regional developments increased the Emperor's concern about the possibility of 'large numbers of Soviet technicians' entering Ethiopia to engage in subversive and anti-regime activity.<sup>190</sup> Iskander Desta, the Emperor's grandson and Deputy Commander of the Navy, confirmed Haile Selassie's concerns by drawing attention to the increased tempo of Soviet penetration into all aspects of Ethiopian life. Desta attributed the Soviet Union's increased interest in Ethiopia, not only to Haile Selassie's visit to Moscow in 1959, but also to the fact that it represented a part of an international plan of achieving 'penetration in many countries.'<sup>191</sup> In June 1962, as Moscow began to cultivate relations with Mogadishu, American diplomats in Ethiopia noted that the Soviet Embassy's information programme in Addis Ababa has shifted its emphasis again. The US Embassy believed that Moscow's envoys were under instructions to 'tread more gently in Ethiopia,'. This indicated a swift adjustment of the erstwhile tough programme towards a more guarded 'watch-and-wait policy.'<sup>192</sup> A Bloc intelligence report suggested that such a cautious policy was aimed at exploiting the differences within the Ethiopian government regarding such issues as the establishment

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<sup>189</sup> 'Sino-Soviet Bloc,' NACP.

<sup>190</sup> CIWS, 'Increased Bloc-Ethiopian Economic Ties,' 16 July 1959, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79-00927A002300090001-8.

<sup>191</sup> C. Bliss, 'Russian Penetration in Ethiopia,' 18 May 1960, NACP, RG59, b. 1365 - CDF 1960-63, f. 661.70/10-2760.

<sup>192</sup> B. Parker, 'Post's Impressions of Current Soviet Cultural and Information Program in Ethiopia,' 8 June 1962, RG84, NACP, Addis Ababa CGR 1959-1961, b. 22 - 350 SOMALI C 1963 - 350.3 BIO DATA C1963, f. 350.21 COMMUNISM C - 1962.

of a US military base in Ethiopia and the government's subjugation to American interests.<sup>193</sup>

Last, but not least, the coup, staged by the Neway brothers, had long-lasting consequences for the Palace. In September 1961, Muslims in western Eritrea clashed with the newly formed Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Soon after, across the Red Sea a radical revolution in Yemen gathered pace and Nasser provided an Egyptian force to support it.<sup>194</sup> As a result, Haile Selassie, began spending more time and effort on the African scene and played a crucial role in making Addis Ababa 'the capital of Africa' by hosting the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity,<sup>195</sup> established in 1963. Other African leaders, eventually, looked up to him as the continent's elder statesman and a man of global prestige, symbolising the struggle against colonialism.<sup>196</sup>

## I. 6. Somalia in search of a patron

On 1 July 1960, Somalia was granted independence. This date marked the end of an era of relative tranquillity and triggered a protracted period of tension. The birth of an independent Somalia through the unification of the former British Somaliland Protectorate and the Italian Trust territory left a considerable number of Somalis in the adjoining French Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya.<sup>198</sup> Consequently, the new state's leadership turned to East and West for economic and political support. In turn, both superpowers had their own reasons for showing their willingness to engage cautiously in

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<sup>193</sup> 'Hodnocení zpráv z Addis Abeby za II. čtvrtletí 1962,' 4 July 1962, ABS, f. I. Správa SNB, sv. 80746, s. 145. Additionally, within the cabinet two camps were identified by East European intelligence sources – a conservative and a progressive one, mainly within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry; see 'Názory některých kruhů na budoucí [sic] vztahů mezi Etiopií a socialistickým táborem,' 26 November 1963, f. ABS, I. Správa SNB, sv. 11435, s. 293.

<sup>194</sup> P. Henze, *Layers of Time* (C Hurst and Co.: London, 2000), 275.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>196</sup> H. Elrich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 136.

<sup>198</sup> H. Brind, 'Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa,' *International Affairs* 60, no 1, (1983/4): 78-80; See also I. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali Nation*, (Oxford: James Curry, 2002), 161-5 and D. Laitin and S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in a Search of State* (Boulder: Westview, 1987), 129-34.

the country. While attempting to cement its position in Addis Ababa, Moscow had to take a cautious approach in Mogadishu, considering the unresolved territorial issues between the neighbouring states. Additionally, Soviet actions were directed against the West, as well as China, as the latter had allegedly turned Somalia into one of its African bases. Moscow and its allies' activities, while initially marked by enthusiasm, culminating with the signing of economic and military agreements, soon evolved into a careful balancing between the two Horn states.

### I. 6.1 The superpowers' 'fight' for Somalia

As soon as Somalia was granted independence, Moscow and Washington with their respective partners attempted to engage in Mogadishu by trying to respond favourably to various Somali needs for development. By underscoring Somalia's potentially strategic location on the shores of the Indian Ocean, the superpowers entered into a contest for establishing their respective positions of influence in the newly formed African state. Czechoslovak observers claimed that the White House's intention to enter the Somali political realm was rather far-fetched. The US was thought to be interested in turning Somalia into a control base for the penetration of Central Africa, where Washington aimed to replace the English and Portuguese colonisers.<sup>199</sup> Owing to its 18-strong diplomatic mission, Washington's representation in Mogadishu was indeed a significant establishment. In addition, almost half the amount paid to Somalia, according to Bloc sources, was earmarked for the construction of a port in Chisimaio and the modification

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<sup>199</sup> 'Mimořádná politická zpráva č. 4 o pronikání USA do Somálska,' 23 April 1962, AMZV, kr. Zprávy ZÚ, Mogadiso [sic] 1961-69, 1975, sv. Mogadišu 1962, č[íslo] 097/63, s. 1.

of the harbour in Mogadishu.<sup>200</sup> As a result, Moscow and its allies launched joint efforts to counter Washington's offensive approach.

As Czechoslovak diplomats were greeted with 'enormous interest' during their tours outside Mogadishu, the spread of promotional activities beyond the capital seemed a fertile ground for increasing the influence of the socialist states in the country. The creation of the Somali state presented Soviet diplomacy with fresh opportunities. Moscow and its Bloc partners found it appropriate to increase diplomatic and political support in the event that Mogadishu decided to promote a 'sharper anti-imperialist course,' and seek support for its policies from the East.<sup>201</sup> Nonetheless, the spread of Somali territorial claims on neighbouring states presented the Soviet leadership with several problems. Like most newly independent countries, Somalia faced the problem of forming and training a professional army. Following the 'very warm reception' accorded to its delegation at the independence celebrations in Mogadishu, Moscow assured Mogadishu of its full support in overcoming the 'colonial legacy,' Czechoslovakia, presumably with Soviet backing, offered arms to Somalia.<sup>202</sup> Mogadishu turned down the offer but 'did not discourage Soviet friendship,'<sup>203</sup> while hoping to obtain assistance from the West. The Kennedy Administration rejected a Somali request for US\$9m in military aid in January 1961. Washington, sensing mounting frustration in Mogadishu, offered to supply modest amounts of defensive military equipment. Moreover, Bonn and Rome proposed joining the aid effort, as well. In sum, the Western programme accounted for an

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>202</sup> For early post-independence Somali-Bloc relations see Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence*, 28 and S. Touval, *Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge: HUP, 1963), 175.

<sup>203</sup> V. Puzyrev, *Torgovyi flot SSSR v lokal'nykh voynakh i konfliktakh* (Moskva, 2009), 28.

army of up to 6,000 men, plus engineering equipment to be used for internal development.<sup>204</sup>

The Somalis were not satisfied with the offered assistance package. Western prestige was in decline and Somali nationalist elements began to point at the vast quantitative differences between the Western and Bloc's military aid plans.<sup>205</sup> The West's reluctance to meet excessive Somali demands allowed Mogadishu to play 'the Soviet card.' To Moscow, this represented a chance to enter Somali politics at the West's expense. However, as it turned out, Mogadishu rejected attachment to any of the camps, firmly stressing its non-aligned status. Within the first couple of years of Somali independence, Moscow was to become acquainted with Somali's defiant foreign policy, dominated by the quest to unify all territories inhabited by Somali people.

### I. 6.2 The Kremlin's early attempts to establish presence in Somalia

The Soviet's entry into Somalia was motivated by a mix of local opportunities, regional objectives, and last, but not least, superpower rivalry. Somalia provided the Soviet leadership with an option to influence a newly emerging state, adjacent to the vital Middle East. This would have counted as a significant victory for the Kremlin in the global power game with the White House. On 11 September 1960, the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with Somalia at ambassadorial level, and sought to engage proactively by proposing large economic investments. The Kremlin's appointment of Boris Fomin as ambassador to Somalia was perceived by Western observers as an attempt to facilitate the acceptance of Soviet-led 'broad and disinterested

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<sup>204</sup> M. Frankel, 'Somalia Accepts Soviet Arms Deal,' *The New York Times*, 11 November 1963, 1; cf. H. Torbert, 31 August 1988, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>205</sup> 'Intelligence Note: Somali Republic May Seek Bloc Military Aid,' 8 September 1961, LoC, The J[ohn] F. K[ennedy] - N[ational] S[ecurity] F[iles], 1961-3, Africa, First Supplement, Ref[erence], b. 158, r[eel] 14.

assistance' for the industrialisation of the country, ensuring its 'full economic independence from the West.'<sup>206</sup>

In pursuing the latter objective a Soviet good-will delegation, headed by the Minister without portfolio Mikhail Lesechko, visited Somalia in April 1961. From the onset, it was clear that Moscow was dealing with a potentially difficult partner. The negotiations were hard and demonstrated that, within the Somali government, there was no agreement regarding its international orientation. At the start of the talks, the Somalis asked for a £100m long-term loan. The Soviet guests saw the request as a provocation and refused to respond to it. In order to keep discussions open, the Soviet emissaries invited the Somali Prime-Minister, Dr Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, to Moscow to discuss further the possibility of receiving Soviet financial assistance.<sup>207</sup> Within a month, in May, Shermarke arrived in the Soviet Union. The Somali leader reportedly claimed that his country was taking the socialist path of development, and stated that the African continent was, in general, supporting the Soviet Union.<sup>208</sup> On 2 June 1961 both sides signed an agreement on economic and technical assistance, totalling more than US\$50m. The aid package was one of the largest relative to population that the Kremlin had given to any country.<sup>209</sup> Consequently, a team of 27 experts from different ministerial departments were sent to Somalia to study the possibility of constructing various industrial facilities, including a deep-sea port.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> TASS, 8 December 1960, 'Ital'yanskoe agenstvo o naznachenii posla SSSR v Somali,' GARF, f. 4459, op. 27, d. 21090, l. 63.

<sup>207</sup> 'Sovětská mise dobré vůle v Somálsku,' 10 April 1961, AMZV, f. TO-O 1960-64, kr. Somálsko 1, sv. 239/111, s. 1.

<sup>208</sup> See second conversation between Khrushchev and Kennedy in Vienna, R[ossiiskii] G[osudarstvenyi] A[rkhiv] N[oveishei] I[storii], f[ond] 52, o[pis] 1, d[elo] 468, ll[ist]. 15-16, Podlinnik, in A. Frunzenko, *Arkhiv Kremlya: Prezidium TsK KPSS: 1954-1964, Tom 3* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2008), 189; Shermarke later rejected to have said this; see Reference note on Somalia, 5 June 1961, DAMVnR-RB, f. P[overitelen], op. 17, pr[episka] 78, por. 1200, s. 2, l. 2; Memo, Aleksiev to Lukanov, 2 July 1961, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 17, pr. 78, por. 1202, ss. 2-3, ll. 2-3; see also Shermarke's speech in *Pravda*, 25 May 1961, 1.

<sup>209</sup> H. Schwartz, 'Somalia Will Get Strong Soviet Aid,' *New York Times*, 18 June 1961, p. 34.

<sup>210</sup> Puzyrev, *Torgovyi*, 28.

As a result, Moscow's politico-economic offensive in Somalia began to gather momentum and signs of Soviet presence became more visible. On 27 March 1962, Somalia signed additional agreements on the establishment of two 250-bed hospitals and a secondary school for 300 students. These were supplemented by high-impact projects, such as the construction of a printing plant in Mogadishu, and the installation of a 50kw radio station, and a civil aviation agreement.<sup>211</sup> The Somali Education Minister, Muhammad Ibrahim Egal, observed that the Russians were intent on seizing the initiative in Somalia, while America, Britain, and Italy were 'endlessly discussing how to channel their assistance.'<sup>212</sup> The Soviet willingness to commit to high-impact projects in key areas, such as the radio station in Mogadishu and the deep-sea port at Berbera, left the American Embassy particularly concerned.<sup>213</sup> At the same time, the US intelligence began to warn of the danger of the Soviet Bloc's use of civil aviation assistance as an instrument of wider economic and political penetration in Africa.<sup>214</sup>

In early August 1962, when it became apparent that Somalia was about to accept Soviet aid for the establishment of its national commercial airline, Washington offered Mogadishu three DC-3 airliners, as well as training assistance on the condition that Somalia rejected the Soviet offer.<sup>215</sup> A day after being informed of the US caveat, Shermarke rejected the American proposal on the basis that Mogadishu refuses to be blackmailed. A month later, Shermarke signed an agreement with Moscow for the construction of the port of Berbera, thus neutralising the principal American development project in Chisimaio.<sup>216</sup> Like with Ethiopia, the Kremlin's assistance package to Somalia was based primarily on

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<sup>211</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Secretary of State, no. 460, 2 April 1963, LoC, JFK-NSF, 1961-3, Ref. b. 158, r. 15.

<sup>212</sup> TASS, 17 September 1961, 'Beseda special'nogo korrespondenta 'Sunday Telegraph's ministrom prosveshcheniya Somaliïskoï respubliki,' GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 397, ll. 137-8.

<sup>213</sup> Lynch, Despatch no. 378, 30 March 1962, NACP, RG59, CDF 1960-63, b. 1365, f. 661.73/7-560.

<sup>214</sup> Hilsman to Rusk, 9 May 1962, F[oreign] R[elations] of the U[nited] S[tates], 1961-1963, Africa, 314-5, cited by Lefebvre, 'The United States, Ethiopia and the 1963 Somali-Soviet arms deal,' 627.

<sup>215</sup> Cable, Department of State to Mogadishu, 11 August 1962, FRUS, Africa, 440-1, see Lefebvre, 'The United States,' 627.

<sup>216</sup> Lefebvre, Op. cit., 627.

highly visible impact projects with great propaganda effect. Importantly, Beijing's interest in Somalia further hardened Moscow's resolve to conclude the Mogadishu arms deal. This presented a major tactical risk in the immediate Horn, as it jeopardised already tenuous relations between Moscow and Addis Ababa.

### I. 6.3 China's approach to Mogadishu

The somewhat difficult start of Soviet-Somali dialogue was further complicated by China's attempt to diminish Soviet influence in the country.<sup>217</sup> This was apparently part of what Moscow regarded as 'CCP leaders' 'obsession with great-power and hegemonic aspirations.'<sup>218</sup> In Moscow's eyes, China's activities in the Third World were aimed at sowing discord within the international socialist movement by undermining the unity of the socialist bloc.<sup>219</sup> The Sino-Soviet split provoked the Kremlin's strong reaction to any inroads being made by Beijing within the newly independent states as they were seen as benefitting the 'neo-colonialist West' at the expense of the peoples in need.<sup>220</sup>

Beijing's relations with Africa went back to the 1955 Bandung Conference where Zhou Enlai pledged Beijing's support for the Afro-Asian struggle for independence in adherence to the principles of peaceful co-existence.<sup>221</sup> The autumn of 1959 saw a growing divergence between Moscow and Beijing's foreign policies approaches, which had an immediate effect on attitudes and plans towards Africa. As late as July 1960, when Soviet analysts were already discussing the 'unreliability' of the African 'national bourgeoisie' and the need for independent working-class action, the Chinese line

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<sup>217</sup> Cf. Memo, SSSR – Afrika, 5 February 1964, A[rhiv] J[ugoslavije], A[rhiv] C[entralnog] K[omiteta] S[aveza] K[omunista] J[ugoslavije], f[ond] 507, IX, 119/III-42, s. 4.

<sup>218</sup> Boris Ponomarev at the 1963 December Plenum of CPSU CC, NSA, READD, b(ox) 10, p. 37.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Speech by Boris Ponomarev, leader of Soviet Delegation at the July 1963 meeting between the CPSU and CCP, 13 July 1963, NSA, READD, b. 10, p. 202.

<sup>221</sup> Bih-jaw Lin, 'Communist China's Foreign Policy in Africa: A Historical Review,' *Issues and Studies* 18, no. 2 (1982): 31.

continued to favour the view that bourgeois and intellectual groups had a conflict of interest with imperialism.<sup>222</sup> The independence of the Somali Republic prompted Beijing to claim that '[t]he birth of this new African state will inevitably influence the further development of the national independence movement in British East and Central Africa.'<sup>223</sup>

Prior to the Sino-Soviet split, it appeared that Moscow and Beijing had divided Africa into spheres of influence, with Chinese activity focussed on Guinea and Mali. Soviet interest in Ethiopia suggested that perhaps Beijing was applying its main efforts to West Africa, while Moscow was concentrating on the East. As soon as the Sino-Soviet split became apparent in 1960, the Chinese launched a diplomatic offensive in the Horn. Beijing chose one of its top Arabic experts, Zhang Yueh, to be the first Ambassador to Somalia in June 1961.<sup>224</sup> In 1963, according to a senior Somali official, the PRC's embassy boasted no fewer than 230 officially registered embassy staff, far more than could be justified by the modest Chinese aid programme carried out in Somalia. The Somali government thus suspected then that the Mogadishu embassy was, in effect, China's African headquarters, before that position was taken by the embassy in Dar es Salaam.<sup>225</sup>

In the early 1960s, the Soviets learned that the PRC was intent on furthering its influence in East Africa by setting up a Communist party in Mogadishu, based on the Chinese model. According to Czechoslovak intelligence, in early February 1962, a high-ranking Somali official visited China. Prior to returning to Mogadishu, he visited Moscow where he informed his Soviet hosts that in Beijing he was urged to establish a

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<sup>222</sup> Lowenthal, 'China,' 168; 191.

<sup>223</sup> H. Jacobson, 'The Development and Characteristics of Chinese Communist Policy Towards Africa,' 21 June 1961, NACP, RG84, Addis Ababa CGR 1959-1961, b. 14, f. 350.21 – COMMUNISM (C) 1961.

<sup>224</sup> J. Cooley, *East Wind over Africa* (New York: Walker and Co., 1965), 25.

<sup>225</sup> A. Hutchinson, *China's African Revolution*, (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1975), 92.

Somali communist party which he refused.<sup>226</sup> Apparently, the Somali leader was unwilling to risk the creation of a communist party without a solid base; this did nothing to weaken Beijing's desire to persuade its guest to create a vanguard party.

Although for the first three years of its existence the Somali Republic lived largely from Italian, British, and some Soviet and American economic assistance, Shermarke accepted an invitation to visit Beijing in August 1963. The Chinese granted Somalia a US\$20m long-term credit and a US\$3m in budgetary support, and offered to build a farm near Chisimaio. The Russians responded by backing two farms for cultivating oil seeds and cotton. Later, the Russians sent more aid for another farm at Hargeisa, complete with buildings, machinery, and a school.<sup>227</sup> Therefore, the recognition of Somalia's economic underdevelopment formed the main instrument for Moscow, as well as for Beijing, in establishing a presence in Mogadishu by engaging in competitive economic assistance.

#### I. 6.4 The Signing of the Somali-Soviet military agreement

However, far more perilous for peace in the Horn was the Sino-Soviet competition for the provision of military assistance to the Somali armed forces that developed in parallel. Arguably, Shermarke shrewdly played the Chinese card to win concessions from the Soviets. As Mogadishu's expansionist ambitions became more evident, and as the West seemed less inclined to offer substantial levels of support, the Somali Prime-Minister announced his intention of seeking Chinese aid.<sup>228</sup> In diplomatic circles there was speculation that the subsequent urgency in the Kremlin's resolve to conclude an arms agreement with Mogadishu was a response to the PRC's attempts at establishing strong

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<sup>226</sup> 'Vytěžení spolupracovníka 'Čedy' k situaci v Somálsku,' 7 February 1962, ABS, I. Správa SNB, sv. 80744, ss. 47-9.

<sup>227</sup> Cooley, *East Wind*, 30-2.

<sup>228</sup> Hutchinson, *China's*, 89.

relations with the African country.<sup>229</sup> In Moscow, Shermarke was welcomed with open arms by the entire Soviet leadership, and initially Khrushchev was less cautious in using weapons as a political instrument.<sup>230</sup> As details of the arms deal leaked out, the West made a counter offer. Three western ambassadors — from West Germany, Italy, and the US - asked to see Shermarke only to find out that ‘Somalia no longer seeks arms from the West.’<sup>231</sup> The Somali government confirmed in October 1963 that a decision in principle had been made to accept Russian arms offer. Within three weeks, 150 Somalis left for training in the USSR and the US embassy received reports that the Soviet military aid would include MiG-17’s, tanks, vehicles, and naval patrol vessels, all to be delivered in less than a year.<sup>232</sup>

While it seems plausible that the Kremlin’s eagerness to provide Somalia with substantial quantities of armaments might have been supported by the military, the Foreign Ministry called for a more cautious approach. This suggests for a possible schism in Moscow as to the degrees of caution regarding relations with Mogadishu. In the Somali case, the Soviet MFA was concerned about the African country’s manifestation of unresolved territorial claims towards its neighbours.<sup>233</sup> Khrushchev’s behaviour, on the other hand, was characteristically inconsistent. Torn between the desire to remain faithful to the ‘testament of the Bolshevik revolution’ and to create a safer international environment for the USSR in the nuclear age,<sup>234</sup> Khrushchev’s initial enthusiasm regarding the newly established African state came to be replaced by a sober assessment of the

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<sup>229</sup> C. Legum, ‘Russians warned on Somalia,’ *The Observer*, 17 November 1963, 2; See also Scrivener to Russell, 16 December 1963, TNA, FO 371/172950, VK 103101/43.

<sup>230</sup> According to Ali Sheikh Mohamed, a member of Shermarke’s delegation, Khrushchev gave the Somali Prime Minister a blank piece asking him to write whatever kind of arms he required; see Hussein Ali Dualeh, *Search for a New Somali Identity* (Nairobi: H A Dualeh), 91-2.

<sup>231</sup> Jama Mohamed Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1995), 53.

<sup>232</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Secretary of State no. 299, 14 October 1963, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1963, b. 4042, f. POL 7 SOMALI.

<sup>233</sup> V. Tarasov, ‘Vstrecha s Somali,’ 71-4; Cf. Memcon, British-Soviet ambassadors, 13 November 1963, TNA, FO 371/172949, folder. VK 103101/31, despatch 64.

<sup>234</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 211.

volatility of potentially dangerous military supplies in unstable local setting. In the Politburo, the Soviet leader requested that Moscow should slow down and reconsider its position vis-à-vis Somalia, as he was by no means willing to pit African peoples one against another with Soviet arms. Additionally, he pleaded for a flexible approach, to avoid alienating Mogadishu.<sup>235</sup> On the ground this approach was displayed by the continuation of military assistance at a very slow and careful pace.<sup>236</sup> For that reason, while maintaining their stake in Somalia, the Soviets managed to sustain their modest presence in Ethiopia, thanks to the Kremlin's economic assistance and Addis Ababa's nonaligned stance.

## I. 7. Conclusion

From the very beginning, the Soviet Bloc's involvement in Africa came under pressure from the processes within the individual states, as well as from Western efforts to gain influence on the continent. This required the Kremlin to develop a flexible line, acknowledging the growing significance of the Third World in international relations. In the process of adapting to emerging conditions in Africa, Moscow had to eliminate 'accumulated reserve and a distrust' towards it.<sup>237</sup> However, during 1962 Soviet policy in Africa experienced a deep crisis. This was the result of one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness, as well as misunderstanding and an underestimation of the specificity of individual African states, errors that produced the failure of Soviet actions in the Congo and Western Africa. As a result, following the exuberant policies of the late-1950s, Moscow developed a new gradualist approach, attempting to engage in low-key propaganda activities, relying on a long-term, realistic political line. Soviet attitudes

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<sup>235</sup> Protocol no. 305, Zasedanie Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, 23 December 1963, P 176/VII, d. 3, d. 208, l. 5, in A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, T 1* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2004), 802.

<sup>236</sup> Memo, Broadley to Norton, 12 May 1964, TNA, FO 371/178681, folder VK 1213/1.

<sup>237</sup> Memo [SSSR – Afrika], 5 February 1964, AJ, A. CK SKJ, f. 507, IX, 119/III-42, s. 2.

during the early 1960s reflected Moscow's efforts to assess the importance and the role of the non-aligned states in the world affairs.<sup>238</sup>

In Ethiopia, following the 1963 Soviet-Somali deal, the Kremlin had to deal with a set of internal constraints. The Emperor and US representatives were well aware of the magnitude of the inroads made by the Kremlin in North-East Africa. As the Ethiopian mass media had been persistently portraying Somalia as Ethiopia's arch-enemy, the Somali-Soviet arms supply agreement was used by Haile Selassie against Moscow.<sup>239</sup> Khrushchev was well aware that the provision of arms to the Somali government would upset Ethiopia. Consequently, the Soviet leadership found itself in a rather delicate position. While the Russians sympathised with the Somali leadership, they traditionally had warm relations with Ethiopia. As the Soviet leader did not want to see the two neighbours clashing, he felt compelled to display diplomatic flexibility.<sup>240</sup> After a period of tactical adjustment, the Soviet Union's activities in Ethiopia, characterised by relatively quiet propaganda activities, were designed to create a favourable image, rather than to incite rebellion. In the West's analysis, the Kremlin aimed to remain on favourable terms with the Imperial regime, while hoping that if the latter failed, it would be in a strong position to influence the events in the country. The Soviet presence, therefore was ultimately aimed at countering Western influence, without giving any indication of militancy or direct confrontation.<sup>241</sup>

There were two additional factors that contributed to Moscow's political manoeuvring in both Horn countries during that period. First, Moscow was reluctant to cause serious deterioration of its relations with the US by strengthening Soviet-Ethiopian

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

<sup>239</sup> 'Názory některých kruhu na budoucí,' ABS, 292-3.

<sup>240</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 3* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2007), 884.

<sup>241</sup> Cable, Addis Ababa to Secretary of State no. 805, 19 February 1964, D[ocument] D[eclassified] R[eference] S[ystem] Online, [Accessed on 4 December 2008].

ties while the West maintained its dominant position of influence over the Imperial regime. Second, the national liberation movement supported by the Soviets in Somalia was not of the usual anti-colonialist, anti-Western orientation, but had an anti-Ethiopian inclination. This complex situation prompted Moscow to call for a flexible combination of the two major approaches in Soviet foreign policy – the ‘Narkomindel’ and the ‘Comintern’ line – in order to maintain close relations with both Ethiopia and its beleaguered neighbour.<sup>242</sup>

Lastly, it would be wrong to consider Khrushchev’s approach in this difficult local setting as naive or immature.<sup>243</sup> Rather, he showed a considerable degree of flexibility in navigating through various interests within the Soviet political leadership, ranging from the Military through the International Department of the Central Committee to the Foreign Ministry. Ultimately, in the Horn by the end of 1963 Khrushchev’s policy called for moderation, the manifestation of which was his attempt at mediation during the Ethiopian-Somali clashes in 1964.

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<sup>242</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 20-1.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. V. Kirpichenko, *Iz Arkhiva Razvedchika* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 1993), 86.

## Chapter Two

### **Hedging Bets in Addis and Mogadishu:**

February 1964 – October 1969

#### II. 1. Introduction

With the signing of the arms deal with Mogadishu, Moscow entered a qualitatively new period in its involvement in the Horn. Until the end of 1960s, when the military took over control in Somalia, the Kremlin operated in a rather unstable local environment. While the Soviet and Bloc diplomats were attempting to overcome the Imperial Regime's inhibition towards them, in Somalia, Moscow had to slow down the military deliveries, agreed in 1963, owing to Mogadishu's dire economic situation. Engaging with both countries, which had unresolved territorial issues between them, the Kremlin realised that it needed a tactful approach in pursuing the objective of maintaining a presence without making excessive efforts in both states.

In Ethiopia Soviet Union and its allies were constantly under suspicion from the Imperial Regime. The radicalisation of students, as well as the growing work force, and the Eritrean movement were perceived by Addis Ababa as factors creating fertile ground for communist penetration. Similarly, Washington aimed to weaken any attempts at growing Soviet influence in Ethiopia. While the Soviet diplomats were closely watched, Moscow enlisted the support of its European allies in the economic field. This was designed to provide cover and facilitate the Bloc's information gathering around posts of vital importance to Washington, especially in Asmara, where the Pentagon had developed a major communication station.

In Somalia, the situation was rather different. Unlike Haile Selassie, who mostly favoured the Americans, and occasionally used the Russians to exert pressure on Washington, Mogadishu attempted to play both superpowers equally. Accordingly, the Kremlin learnt how difficult it was to deal with the Somalis, who were taking their neutralist stance quite seriously. In return, Moscow devised a plan to keep Mogadishu on a short leash by delaying the delivery of armed material, spare parts, and petroleum lubricants, needed for the operation of the Soviet-built machinery. In so doing, the Kremlin hoped it could put a brake on Mogadishu's aggressive plans towards its neighbours. This approach apparently achieved partial success, as an internal Somali political crisis led to a short period of Ethiopian-Somali rapprochement. The Soviet Union's attempts to assist the local parties in containing their conflict came to an end with the renewal of border skirmishes. This led to a new bout of hostility between the two African states. This further intensified the political crisis in Mogadishu, which culminated in a bloodless coup d'état that brought the military to the political forefront. This local development, once again, changed the Soviet perception not only towards Somalia, but also to the whole region, where Moscow's patience seemed to yield positive results.

## II. 2. Somali-Ethiopian border clashes in 1964

Moscow's enthusiastic approach towards Somalia, exemplified by the signing of the 1963 arms deal, was replaced by a more cautious approach, engendered by the presence of Ethiopian-Somali border issues. Soon after concluding the agreement, hostilities between the two neighbours erupted. In effect, the announcement of the Soviet-Somali deal altered the perceived local balance of forces. It had prompted the Addis Ababa pre-emptively to deploy military forces before Mogadishu had a chance to build up their

military capacity. An Ethiopian army division was despatched to strategic points along the 1,600 km border, and, in mid-January 1964, a strike was launched on Somali territory. In return, Mogadishu sent out troops and declared a state of emergency. In a demonstration of its commitment, Ethiopia made a decisive use of its air combat units by launching bombing raids against Somali towns, including the main northern city of Hargeisa. In the meantime, extensive diplomatic initiatives by the embittered parties accompanied the military actions on the ground. The OAU held emergency sessions and initiated mediation efforts; in addition, the US expressed disagreement with Somalia's territorial ambitions. Similarly, the Somali challenge to the colonial borders found no support amongst other African states, including Egypt.

In spite of the slogan, popular in Mogadishu, 'with one hand we fight, with the other we vote,' the Somali general elections of March 1964 showed that the government could not sustain its engagement in the confrontation for much longer. The outgoing government of Abdirashid Ali Shermarke launched negotiations with Addis Ababa, and a truce was agreed on 6 March. At the end of the month, the foreign ministers of the two countries met and signed an accord in Khartoum, mapping out the withdrawal of their military units from the border, agreeing to halt the hostile propaganda and give negotiations for a lasting peace a new lease of life.<sup>244</sup>

## II. 2.1 Soviet Attitudes towards the Somali-Ethiopian border clashes

Moscow watched warily as the hostilities between the neighbours became dangerously close to erupting into a local war. Instead of increasing military deliveries to Somalia, as border clashes were attracting international attention, the Kremlin decided to launch cautious mediation efforts with both parties. Western observers even saw, in Moscow's

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<sup>244</sup> J. Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 180.

actions, an opportunistic move to use attempts at peace-making efforts to achieve an even greater position of influence in the Horn. Additionally, Soviet behaviour during the crisis implied the Kremlin's unwillingness to tolerate a local conflict, which might have eventually evolved into a general war, involving the White House. Soviet behaviour, therefore, showed flexibility in accommodating international and local stimuli in advancing its objectives during the period, namely, to maintain a presence and counter American influence as much as possible.



**Map 3** Area inhabited with Somali people after decolonisation <sup>245</sup>

<sup>245</sup> Map source: NACP, Nixon Presidential Material Staff, b. H-068, National Security Council Institutional ('H') Files Meeting Files (1969-74), f. SRG Meeting – NSSM 184 Horn of Africa 7/25/73.

Soon after the escalation of the Somali-Ethiopian border clashes in early 1964, Moscow endorsed the 1964 OAU declaration on post-colonial African borders, thus refraining from supporting the Somali irredentist claims. The Soviets also recognised that supplying modern weapons to Somalia would complicate their local standing at a time when they were trying to improve relations with Ethiopia.<sup>246</sup> Lastly, Moscow was also anxious that the clashes between Somalia and Ethiopia might escalate into full-blown war, eventually involving the superpowers. The Kremlin, as a result, pleaded for moderation and in early March despatched its deputy foreign minister, Yakov Malik, to both countries. At the same time, brief news items on the Ethiopian-Somali border clashes appeared in the Soviet press, conveying a carefully constructed neutral stance. The Soviets seemed to have nothing to gain from the continued escalation of the hostile behaviour on either side of the border. Consequently, Khrushchev sent out personal letters to both local leaders, cautiously implying Western guilt by claiming that the conflict favoured those forces ‘which might use it to weaken African unity in the fight against ‘colonialism.’<sup>247</sup>

Simultaneously, the Soviet reactions to the situation in the Horn provoked American interest. Washington’s representatives monitored Malik’s shuttle diplomacy in February-March and took into account Khrushchev’s letters to both parties. They acknowledged that by playing the peacemaker’s card Moscow exercised ‘predominant influence in the Horn of Africa’<sup>248</sup> in preventing the ‘flames of the border conflict’ from turning into ‘a fire of war,’ as Khrushchev put it.<sup>249</sup> Interestingly, to the American diplomats in Addis Ababa, Khrushchev appeared quite sincere in his efforts at avoiding

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<sup>246</sup> R. Remnek, ‘The Soviet-Somali “Arms for Access” Relationship,’ *Soviet Union* 10, no. 1 (1983): 61.

<sup>247</sup> Cable, Moscow to Secretary of State, 12 February 1964, NACP, RG59, CFP 1964-66, b. 2153, f. POL 32-1 ETH-SOMALI.

<sup>248</sup> INR intelligence note, 6 March 1964, NACP, RG59, CFP 1964-66, b. 2154, f. POL – 32-1 ETH-SOMALI 3/1/64.

<sup>249</sup> Khrushchev’s message to Haile Selassie, *Pravda*, 12 February 1964, 1.

further intensification in the fighting between Ethiopia and Somalia and he was wary of a genuine risk of the conflict to involve the great powers.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, the US envoys to Mogadishu interpreted the Soviets' abstaining from supporting the Somali nationalism as fear of antagonising other African states.<sup>251</sup> Subsequently, the translation of Soviet attitudes into actions on the ground was manifested in the modest deliveries of transport and small arms to Somalia in 1964, with no indications of acceleration of arms shipments.<sup>252</sup> Moscow's behaviour during the Ethiopian-Somali crisis clearly demonstrated the Kremlin's objective of maintaining presence in both countries, but not at any price. Moscow sought to increase its influence, not by fuelling the conflict, but rather by mediating in it.

### II. 3. Development of Soviet interest in Somalia after 1964

In Somalia through the mid-1960s until the end of the decade, the Kremlin was engaged mainly in the military and the economic fields. Despite encountering various problems, the Kremlin decided to remain in the country, while also being involved in Ethiopia. However, it appears that military assistance lagged behind the economic effort. This suggests that the military leadership, while undeniably figuring prominently during the discussions in high political circles for the provision of the 1963 military assistance, gave way to the MFA's cautious assessment. Throughout the second half of the 1960s this sober realisation was manifested on the ground by a milder political course which was consistent with the Narkomindel line in Soviet Foreign policy.

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<sup>250</sup> Memo, Thompson to Tasca, 11 March 1964, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1964-66, b. 2154, f. POL – 32-1.

<sup>251</sup> Cable, Mogadiscio [sic] 623, 4 March 1964, L[yndon] B[aines] J[ones] L[ibrary], N[atational] S[ecurity] F[ile], b. 99, Country File, Somalia, f. Somalia, Vol. I, 1/64-5/68.

<sup>252</sup> Cable, Mogadishu 666, 27 March 1964, LBJL, NSF, b. 99, f. Somalia, Vol. I.

## II. 3.1 Military Assistance

The Soviet Union made no explicit effort to support Somali nationalism and maintained complete neutrality on the question of the Somali-Ethiopian border dispute. As a result, the provision of military assistance during the 1960s remained limited. Nevertheless, Moscow engaged in extensive training for the Somali armed forces. As early as February 1964, at least 90 Somali cadets visited the Soviet Union. In addition, the first squadron of MiG-15s, along with Soviet maintenance personnel, and seventy Soviet military instructors were reported to have been allocated to Somali military camps. By 1966, about 600 Somalis were attending military schools in the Soviet Union, while a military mission of at least 250 Russians was established in Somalia.<sup>253</sup> The Soviet military, however, soon began experiencing difficulties as Somalia was unable to honour the associated interest and maintenance payments, and other costs.<sup>254</sup> According to British intelligence, Mogadishu approached Moscow for further military assistance towards the end of 1965. Although it appeared that the Russians were not prepared to supply any additional equipment, they agreed to increase technical and training assistance.<sup>255</sup> In the final analysis, through their readiness to engage in training of large numbers of Somali officers, the provisions of the 1963 agreement and the subsequent Soviet military aid programme to Somalia appeared to be designed to unfold over a longer period. By avoiding any drastic involvement through the sudden introduction of military hardware to Mogadishu, Moscow aimed to dispel the imminent repercussion of the militarisation of Somali domestic politics and soften the distress in its delicate relations with Addis Ababa.

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<sup>253</sup> *New York Times*, 13 March 1966, cited in Aryeh Yodfat, 'The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa,' *Northeast African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1979-80): 4.

<sup>254</sup> Y. Etinger, *Mezhgosudarstvennye otnosheniya v Afrike*, 82, cited in Remnek, 'Soviet-Somali,' 61.

<sup>255</sup> J[oint] I[n]telligence] C[ommittee] Note, JIC 654/66, TNA, CAB 163/97, fo. 13.

## II. 3.2 Economic activities

Apart from military aid, Soviet influence in the Somali Republic was exercised mainly by economic means. Moscow's undertaking in Somalia, at the time, surpassed its activity in Ethiopia. By September 1964, the Soviets had completed two hospitals, a secondary school and a printing plant, and, until 1967, the volume of trade with Somalia was about 25 per cent higher than that with Ethiopia.<sup>256</sup> Although Somali-Soviet relations in the 1960s showed that ideology had little influence over the Kremlin's entry into Mogadishu,<sup>257</sup> the Soviets managed to secure a valuable position within the broadcast media. The Soviet gift of a 50-kilowatt transmitter to Mogadishu radio, gave them an entree into this field. Similarly, socialist influence became noticeable for some time in the language of Mogadishu radio propaganda against Ethiopia, Kenya, and Britain.<sup>258</sup>

Importantly, there were indications that the Soviets had found, in the Somalis, a difficult local client. The Soviet development projects were not performing as designed. Moreover, only about half of the 1961 credit had been drawn by 1966.<sup>259</sup> Once completed, the facilities became the property of the Somalis and the Soviets assumed that the new factories would form the backbone of the public sector. Moscow's Ambassador, Semyon Dyukarev, even fashioned the mantra: 'we will help create the government sector, and it will find its way on its own.' However, the drawback in the Soviet-Somali trade agreements was due to Mogadishu's inability to fulfil its contractual obligations. For example, the Somalis were unable to provide fresh water for a meat plant, built on the outskirts of the port city of Chisimaio. The city's water supply network was built by the

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<sup>256</sup> See L. Holowaty, *The Soviet Union and Countries of the African Horn* (PhD Dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 1970), 206 and Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 56.

<sup>257</sup> P. Henze, 'The Soviet Impact on African Political Dynamics,' in *The Red Orchestra, Volume 2*, ed. D. Bark (Stanford: Hoover, 1988), 39-40.

<sup>258</sup> CAB 163/97, fo.13.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

US and the Soviets accused Washington of refusing to supply water.<sup>260</sup> Interestingly, to the Americans the situation appeared somewhat different. The US-built water purification plant had two major issues. First, it was far too big for Somali water needs and became too costly to operate. Secondly, the Somalis, even after having undergone training, proved unable to run it with its specific requirements. Therefore, in the end, the structure was abandoned as too expensive and complex to run.<sup>261</sup>

### II. 3.3 East-West confrontation in Somalia

Another factor that kept Soviet Union's interest in Somalia was Mogadishu's non-aligned position. Despite the conclusion of various assistance packages with the Eastern Bloc, Somalia maintained relations with the West, as well. This increased the value of the African country in the competition for influence between the superpowers. By 1966 Washington was also maintaining its interest in Somalia. American interest was mainly political and military-strategic, owing to Mogadishu's geographical position at the entrance of the Red Sea. The weakening of Britain's role in Aden and the Arabian Peninsula in the mid-1960s, heightened Somalia's military-strategic value for the Pentagon's planning. Besides, Washington attentively observed the implementation of Soviet military aid to Somalia, which justified the intensification of American intelligence gathering.<sup>262</sup>

Symptomatic in this respect was the incident involving the American military attaché Colonel Rosner. Along with the Italian commercial attaché, Rosner was arrested while patrolling an area where Soviet military equipment was usually delivered. Born in

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<sup>260</sup> V. Tarasov, 'Vstrecha s Somali,' in *Afrika v vospominaniyakh veteranov diplomaticheskoi sluzhby*, ed. A. Vasiliev (Moskva: XXI vek-soglasie, 2000), 75-6.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with P. Stahnke, 1 June 1994, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>262</sup> 'Pronikání USA do Somálska - mim. politická zpráva č.8,' 25 June 1966, AMZV, kr. Zprávy ZÚ Mogadišo 1961-9, 1975, svazek: Mogadišo, ss. 2-3.

pre-war Czechoslovakia to Jewish parents, and fluent in Czech, Rosner underwent special training for agents, targeting the socialist countries. Most of Washington's 23-strong diplomatic staff, including the Ambassador, spoke Italian, which was important when reaching out to the local population. Moreover, at least two thirds of America's diplomatic roster was reportedly filled by CIA operatives. American advisers and experts were also placed in key Ministries, especially within the Somali police.<sup>263</sup> Washington was also accused by the Bloc's local observers of furthering its regional goals by using Rome's friendly relations with its former colony. Yet, true to its neutral stance, Mogadishu refused Italy's plan, allegedly made together with the US, to build launch pads for commercial satellites in the Northeast Somalia.<sup>264</sup> All these American efforts were perceived by the Bloc's specialists as aiming to counteract the Soviet impact in Mogadishu.<sup>265</sup>

Although isolated in OAU councils,<sup>266</sup> thanks to its expansionist designs, Somalia maintained a valuable neutralist stance internationally, resisting Western advances. Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s, mounting military and economic problems prompted the Kremlin to reassess its position in Somalia. Moscow found there was little profit here and seemed to entertain the possibility of a face-saving opportunity to disengage to some extent.<sup>267</sup> For that reason, the Soviets continued the cautious exploitation of their position in Somalia, while also trying to preserve relations with Ethiopia.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>266</sup> Cable, US Embassy, Moscow to Secretary of State no. 37471, 13 March 1967, NACP, RG59, b. 2071, CFPF 1967-69, f. POL 7 ETH 3/1/67.

<sup>267</sup> JIC Note, 'The Implications of Soviet Bloc Military aid to the Somali Republic,' 1 August 1966, JIC 654/66, TNA, CAB 163/97, fo.13.

## II. 4. The Soviet bid to maintain presence in Ethiopia

Throughout the 1960s, the cautious line in Moscow's foreign policy in Ethiopia was manifested by the Kremlin's engagement in an intricate long-term political programme. It aimed to overcome the Emperor's psychological inhibition, while winning influence by the 'force of example.' Although Soviet-Ethiopian relations suffered temporarily when the Kremlin agreed to provide military support to Somalia, the arms deal never reached its intended levels, and, throughout the decade, Ethiopia remained the Kremlin's regional focus. Since his 1959 visit to the Soviet Union, Haile Selassie appeared to have devised complex justification for tolerating the Soviet Bloc's involvement in Ethiopia. His desire to maintain a non-aligned image in international affairs coincided with the objective of keeping lines of communication with Moscow open in hopes of inducing the Kremlin to limit its support for Somalia.<sup>268</sup> In addition, the Emperor did not shrink from using the Soviet card in attempting to secure America's participation in Ethiopia's economic and military development.

As soon as Moscow realised the increased continental importance of Addis Ababa, after the establishment of the OAU in May 1963, its interest in promoting a policy of friendship and co-operation with Ethiopia intensified. Moscow's approach towards Ethiopia in the 1960s aimed to maintain good relations with the Imperial Government. Indirectly, however, the Soviets appeared to be preparing for long-term penetration by engaging in actions, the actual scope of which might have initially appeared politically insignificant.<sup>269</sup> An example of a seemingly 'innocent' political move was the Kremlin's decision to extend the term of its ambassador, Arkadi Boudakov, who arrived in Ethiopia in 1959. Moscow might have realised that his

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<sup>268</sup> NIE, 'Prospects in the Horn of Africa,' 75/76-67, 27 April 1967, LBJL, NSF, b. 8, NIEs, f. 75/76, Horn of Africa.

<sup>269</sup> Elrich, 'The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,' in *The Red Orchestra*, 133.

position of influence as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Addis provided him with powerful political leverage. The doyen of the diplomatic service, apart from enjoying considerable prestige amongst his colleagues, received priority or free access to the Emperor. He also used the advantage of having legitimate and constant contact with all eleven African diplomatic missions in Addis Ababa. Finally, very often for reasons of space, the Dean represented all heads of missions collectively.<sup>270</sup> This represented an enviable position, not only for the acquisition of first-hand information ahead of everybody else in the diplomatic corps, but also for the exercise of control over its dissemination.

In addition to such political manoeuvres, in Addis Ababa propaganda efforts remained one of Moscow's main instruments of involvement. Growing Western influence, as well as the Emperor's reluctance to enlist the offered Soviet assistance justified the importance Moscow saw in giving priority to various soft power moves. Interestingly, all cultural events and propaganda programmes, carried out by the Soviet cultural centre in Addis Ababa, paid scant attention to the fundamental ideological differences between the two countries. Instead, when touring the provinces, a prominent part was given to demonstrations of the great achievements of the Soviet Union. This general outlook towards the Russians' international conduct had played an instructive role for the Imperial Government's security services and their Western advisors when assuming Soviet-led covert role in the spread of student discontent at the end of 1960s.

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<sup>270</sup> Memo, Russell to Scrivener, 9 June 1965, TNA, FO 371/183874, fo. VA 1901/6.

## II. 4.1 The Ethiopian student movement

In the mid-1960s, the rise of the student movement made the Ethiopian government officials sceptical of the veracity of Soviets' ambition of 'honest co-existence'<sup>271</sup> in Ethiopia. While no hard evidence supported the alleged accusations of Soviet-led behind-the-scene fomenting of student unrest, Moscow and its East European allies increasingly found themselves under pressure from Ethiopian counter-intelligence. Indeed, the Ethiopian student movement, while inspired by similar international developments, was domestic in origin. It developed in response to growing disaffection with the Emperor and his policies. The presence in the country of Socialist states' diplomats and their open contacts with legitimate student organisations, confirmed Haile Selassie's conviction that Soviet Bloc representatives were conspiring against his regime.

Towards the end of the 1960s, given that the political parties in Ethiopia were not permitted, manifestations of social discontent were channelled through ever growing student unrest. As the economic situation in Ethiopia deteriorated and the Emperor became even more susceptible to external pressure, owing to the constant need for economic assistance, student demonstrations were seen by Bloc observers as decidedly political and anti-American.<sup>272</sup> In addition, student discontent was followed by a gradual polarisation of forces within the Imperial Court,<sup>273</sup> suggesting that the Emperor was weaker than he had been. Moreover, the Addis Ababa regime became highly suspicious of Bloc diplomats' potential covert influence over student dissidence. Moscow's and Prague's envoys were expelled from Ethiopia on the premise of their meddling in Ethiopia's internal affairs by allegedly inciting rebellion. While their role was not factually established, it seemed that most of the allegations were based on conjecture and

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<sup>271</sup> F. Schatten, *Communism in Africa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 123-4.

<sup>272</sup> 'Zaznam,' 19 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 1, sv. 212/112, no. 4, s. 1.

<sup>273</sup> 'Předběžná informace o probíhajících studentských nepokojích,' 4 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-69, sv. 212/113, no. 5, s. 3.

Moscow's allies saw American involvement in persuading the Emperor of the Bloc's wrongdoing.

The militant phase of the student movement started in the mid-1960s. The emergence in 1964 of a radical Marxist cell in the HSIU, known as the 'Crocodiles,' with no more than a dozen members, was crucial in this respect. It grew gradually and in by March 1969 the 'Crocodiles' numbered about 100, and were able to count on the support of about 1,000 non-communist students.<sup>274</sup> The 'Crocodiles' proved true to their name, often staying under cover and preferring to embed their ideas within the student movement through prominent figures. In addition, with the support of the student body Marxist elements in 1966 established the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA).<sup>275</sup> Student declarations and protests, backed by the USUAA and the leftist National Union of Ethiopian University Students (NUEUS), became increasingly hostile and pro-Communist in tone.<sup>276</sup> Its president, Mesfin Kassa, known for his progressive persuasion, visited the USSR twice, returning from his second visit in late August 1967.<sup>277</sup>

At the end of March 1968, student riots broke out in Addis Ababa and led to a month of student unrest. Subsequent riots led to attacks on the US Embassy and on the Ethiopian Ministry of Information, and forced the closing of the HSUI and all schools in the capital. The members of the radical student movements saw socialism, especially Marxism, as the only saviour of the oppressed masses of Ethiopia. At the time, it was fashionable amongst students to quote Chairman Mao, Che Guevara, Lenin, or Marx and

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<sup>274</sup> T. Hughes, 'Ethiopia: Growing radicalism – A British View,' INR Research Memorandum RAF-9, 2 July 1969, NACP, RG59, b. 2073, CFPF 1967-69, f. POL 15-1 ETH 1-1-68.

<sup>275</sup> See Bahru Zewde's *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 220-3 and 'Intellectuals and Soldiers,' CODESRIA Paper, Dakar, 8-11 December 2003, 3.

<sup>276</sup> Report on student disorders in Ethiopia, July 1968, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP78-03061A000400030031-2.

<sup>277</sup> P. Dokuzov, 'Otnosno mladezhkite organizatsii v Etiopiya,' 4 September 1967, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 23, d. 55, pr. 1051, s. 1, l. 14.

to seek a solution to every problem in Marx or Lenin's writings.<sup>278</sup> The Russian, Cuban, and Chinese revolutions were the most widely discussed. Active members of the Ethiopian student movement, which later came to be known 'as the most radical in Africa,'<sup>279</sup> were comfortable with lauding the virtues of Marxism and revolution for the future of the country.<sup>280</sup>

The expression of Marxist sentiments amongst the HSIU students led to rumours in the diplomatic corps about a possible behind-the-scene role of Bloc diplomats. Moscow's Embassy staff deployed rather cunning tactics, knowing that once the revolt was underway they would be the government's prime suspect.<sup>281</sup> During the riots, in a search of the offices of the two student organisations and of the official USUAA newspaper, *Struggle*, the police found considerable amounts of pro-Communist, anti-American posters, pamphlets and hand-outs, many from the International Union of Students, as well as educational films of Soviet and Czech origin. During police questioning, student leaders revealed that they had been in contact with the Counsellor of the Czech Embassy. Some students were reportedly paid by the Soviet representatives to participate in the demonstrations and were also recruited for the establishment of a Communist party in Ethiopia.<sup>282</sup>

However, the Emperor's particular concern was with the possibility of Soviet and Bloc covert involvement in the 1968 student unrest was the Amharic-language broadcasts

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<sup>278</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears, War Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 1989), 10-1.

<sup>279</sup> Teshale Tibebu, 'Modernity, Eurocentrism, and radical politics in Ethiopia, 1961-1991,' *African Identities* 6, no. 4 (November 2008): 346.

<sup>280</sup> Dawit, *Op. cit.*, 10-1; Cf. R. Balsvik, *Haile Selassie I Students* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1985), 265.

<sup>281</sup> Apparently, the Tanzanians and Ghanaians offered their assistance in liaising with the dissident student groups. The car of the Tanzania Chargé, Paul Rupia, was reportedly seen almost every day for a week before the HSIU riot of 13 May 1965, entering alternately the Soviet Embassy and the University campus. See Russell to Scrivener, 9 June 1965, FO 371/183874.

<sup>282</sup> Report on student disorders in Ethiopia, July 1968, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP78-03061A000400030031-2.

by Radio Moscow.<sup>283</sup> In addition, the Czechoslovakian Embassy had regular contact with various legitimate student organisations. It was thus ‘an unfortunate coincidence,’ that Prague’s representatives were seen in numerous conversations with students.<sup>284</sup> This ‘circumstantial evidence,’ convinced the Emperor that the Bloc’s diplomats stood behind the students’ opposition to the Ethiopian regime.<sup>285</sup> This provoked the government to declare three Soviets and three Czechoslovak diplomats *personae non gratae* on 13 March.<sup>286</sup>

Ethiopian security sources revealed that they had ‘full proof’ of the subversive activities of the expelled Soviet and Czechoslovak ‘agents.’ They said a ‘compartmentalised’ system had been elaborated among students. Various ‘cells’ of students were thus said to have been assigned certain tasks which ‘put together in a pattern pre-conceived by the foreign agents but unknown to the full group of students, amounted to a calculated betrayal of the people of Ethiopia.’ According to an Ethiopian official, Radio Moscow had made the Soviet complicity in subversive activities obvious as ‘their recent broadcasts against Ethiopia were virtually an admission of guilt.’<sup>287</sup>

All the same, the fact that many of the student publications displayed a distinctly Marxist flavour implied no more than possible ‘ideological’ backing from the Soviet

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<sup>283</sup> Beginning in April 1958 with a 15-minute daily programmes in English and French, by the autumn of 1961 the length of Radio Moscow broadcasting in Africa reached 56 hours a week in English, French, Portuguese, Swahili, and Amharic. See RGANI, f. 3, op. 12, d. 639, l. 61; See also P. Lessing, *Africa's Red Harvest*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1962), 120-2; cf. A Davidson et al, *SSSR i Afrika*, 138-9.

<sup>284</sup> Informace pro PIS k šifře Pavliček 18 (ZÚ Addis Abeba), 17 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 1, sv. 212/112, no. 4, s. 1.

<sup>285</sup> T. Hughes, ‘Ethiopia’s Student Crisis: A standoff,’ INR Intelligence note no. 212, 25 March 1969, NACP, RG59, b. 2074, CFPF, 1967-69, f. POL 23-8 ETH 1/1/69.

<sup>286</sup> The two expelled Russians were Mikhail Novikov, Radio Moscow’s correspondent to Ethiopia and the TASS reporter, Victor Matveev. The third Russian, Vladimir Charaev, of the Soviet Permanent Exhibition, was presently outside of Ethiopia and was prohibited from entering the country. The three Czechoslovak diplomats were Jozef Barton, the attaché in the Czechoslovak Embassy, Vincent Stefanek, and Ladislav Poslusny, both of the commercial section of Prague’s Embassy; see ‘Ethiopia Bans Three Czech, Three Russian Officials For Subversive Activity,’ *Ethiopian Herald*, 14 March 1969, in Propaganda guidelines, 01 May 1969, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79-01194A000500110001-9.

<sup>287</sup> ‘Ethiopia Bans,’ *Ethiopian Herald*, 14 March 1969.

Bloc.<sup>288</sup> The Yugoslavs, however, who opposed Moscow's strong hand during the Prague Spring, did not exclude the possibility of Soviets' meddling in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, as well. According to Belgrade's emissaries, the encouraging of student riots was most likely aimed at weakening Ethiopia's non-aligned status in international affairs.<sup>289</sup> One of the expelled Czechoslovakian diplomats, however, the coder Josef Barton,<sup>290</sup> had a different opinion. Upon returning to Prague he admitted in a special report to the Czechoslovak Security Services (StB) that, throughout his stay in Addis Ababa, he had had nothing to do with the student rebellion.<sup>291</sup>

While evidently convinced that the Soviets would be able to overthrow the Emperor by aiding the students, the Imperial government was reluctant to alienate the USSR any further.<sup>292</sup> The Chargé of the Soviet Embassy, Komarov, requested a meeting with Haile Selassie and asked his permission for the expelled diplomats to be allowed to stay for another 48 hours in the country. While the Emperor agreed to the Soviet demand,<sup>293</sup> the Ethiopian government condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, believing that it threatened the freedom of small states.<sup>294</sup> In an attempt to strengthen Ethiopia's non-discriminatory approach towards foreign interference, and to emphasise

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<sup>288</sup> H. Hogger, 'Copy of minute about a conversation with Signor Crosetti,' 20 February 1970, TNA, FCO 31/545, fo. 2.

<sup>289</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Belgrade, no. 13, 19 March 1969, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1969, fasc. 40, dos. 10, sig. 410232, s. 2.

<sup>290</sup> Barton, apart from his cryptographic activities served as head of the party organisation at the Czechoslovak embassy. Therefore, he fully participated in the political and professional life of the representation. See 'Zpráva pobytu Josefa Bartoně na ZÚ A. Abeba od srpna 1967 do března 1969,' 11 April 1969, ABS, svazek 39212, s. 3. Similarly, in addition to being described as an experienced and highly skilled, in his political line he was known as one of the most ardent propagandist of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. See Kpt. Jaroslav Pekař's professional profile of Josef Bartoň, 24 May 1972, ABS, sv. 39212, s. 2.

<sup>291</sup> 'Zpráva pobytu Josefa Bartoně,' s. 2. Two other reports from the Czechoslovak Embassy to the Foreign Ministry dismiss any involvement on their part: Zaznam, 19 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 1, sv. 212/112, no. 4, s. 1 and 'Studentské nepokoje v Addis Ababě,' 1 June 1965, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-69, sv. 212/113, no. 5, s. 2.

<sup>292</sup> T. Hughes, 'Ethiopia's Student Crisis: A standoff,' INR Intelligence note no. 212.

<sup>293</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Belgrade no. 13, 19 March 1969, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1969, fasc. 40, dos. 10, sig. 410232, s. 2.

<sup>294</sup> 'Zabeleška o reagovanju afričkih i arapskih zemalja na događaje u vezi sa ČSSR i reperkusije na konferenciju nesvrstanih,' 17 September 1968, AJ, f. 837, K[abinet] P[redsednika] R[epublike] I-3-a/24-25, s. 3.

its non-aligned international status, the Imperial government ordered an American Peace Corps teacher, based at the University, to leave the country within 48 hours. He was found guilty of harbouring expelled HSIU students who were involved in the demonstrations. Although they were not allowed to be re-registered at the University, the American teacher offered to organise them into study groups in his private home or student dorms.<sup>295</sup>

As a result, the Bloc's diplomats fell victim to the precarious and rather contradictory nature of Ethiopian domestic politics. The vigilance of Imperial counter-intelligence services<sup>296</sup> and the regime's decision to expel the diplomats was in line with the regime's desire to demonstrate its resistance to any external interference in Ethiopia's domestic affairs.<sup>297</sup> In addition, in the Bloc's assessment, the CIA residence in Addis Ababa reportedly had a strong influence over the Ethiopian Interior Ministry, thus getting indirectly involved in the regime's internal affairs. The justification for this alleged move on the part of the CIA was provided by the notion that the Americans saw some danger in the increase of Czechoslovakian exports to Ethiopia. Therefore, the evolving economic activities were seen by Langley's security detail as a potentially potent tool not only for Prague, but also for the Socialist community. The meddling of the US intelligence services was seen by the Bloc's observers as the main reason why Czechoslovak and Soviet Union citizens were found guilty of illegal activities against the regime.<sup>298</sup>

Indeed, Ethiopian counter-intelligence may have amassed circumstantial evidence needed to accuse Bloc diplomatic personnel of involvement in illegitimate activities. Nonetheless, what Haile Selassie's security police counted as undeniable proof of covert support, was most likely considered by Soviet allies as routine, informative, and open

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<sup>295</sup> K. Vladov, 31 March 1969, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 20p, d. 12, pr. 209, ss. 10ff, ll. 11ff.

<sup>296</sup> Reference note, 'Otnosno agenturno operativnata rabota na otdel IV-PGU-DS Etiopiya,' 12 February 1971, ANRS, f. 9, d. 2843, ch[ast] I, s. 6, l. 23.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. Vladov, 31 March 1969, s. 10, l. 11.

<sup>298</sup> 'Zaznam,' 19 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 1, sv. 212/112, no. 4, s. 2.

contacts with aspirational Ethiopian youth. The spread of the student movement and its suspected links with the Socialist states made the Ethiopian government officials wary of Moscow's and its allies' actions in Ethiopia. As a result, the Bloc continued to maintain its cautious line in Addis Ababa in an attempt to preserve its presence in the country.

## II. 4.2 The labour unions

In parallel with the student movement, the mid-1960s witnessed an increase in Ethiopia's labour movement which attracted the interest of the Soviet Bloc representatives. However, in their external relations the unions were more interested in the West. This, however, did not preclude the government from fearing possible clandestine relationships of the Bloc's states with the trade unions' leaders. While Ethiopia was at an early stage of its industrialisation, its urban work force grew considerably. Moreover, the rising wave of social unrest in the early 1960s led to a spontaneous increase of workers' associations. While allowing the unions, the regime monitored their activity primarily in an attempt to cultivate and direct them.<sup>299</sup> Addis Ababa feared that, parallel to the student unrest, the political thrust of the labour movement might become uncontrollable, as well. Of concern particularly was the inferred increase in the level of Bloc activity with the growing number of worker's associations. Overtly, at least, Bloc's relations with the Ethiopian labour movement were progressing at a steady pace.<sup>300</sup> In the final analysis, Socialist states had a limited ability to influence the trends in developing Ethiopia's organised labour movement, owing to the latter's interest in maintaining contacts with their western counterparts.

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<sup>299</sup> 'Politická zpráva č. 7, Současná situace v etiopských odborech,' 22 April 1970, NAČR, f. A ÚV KSČ, Gustav Husák, k[arton] 982, sv. 9902, s. 1.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 7; Cf. A-529, 27 March 1968, NACP.

In the Bloc's opinion, as from the mid-1950s, when Ethiopia had embarked on a process of building industrial plants, its working class grew stronger by pursuing its organisational interests and the labour unions were expected to play an active role in the social life of the country.<sup>301</sup> The organised labour movement in Ethiopia began on 5 September 1962 with the recognition of the principle of collective bargaining and the prohibition of unfair labour practices, providing for the creation of a Labour Relations Board for the settlement of disputes. By mid-1963, forty-two labour unions were established, and the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) was formed, soon claiming a membership of 70,000 industrial workers.<sup>302</sup> One of the first indications of workers' organisational consciousness was the strike in the Ethiopian airlines, which took place in October 1964 and lasted a week. The formal reason behind it was the request for an increase of salaries, but it also appeared as a form of protest against the presence of the American workers at the airline, who earned salaries in the range of Eth\$ 3-4,000 as opposed to Eth\$ 100-300, received by the Ethiopian personnel. The strike attracted the attention of all Ethiopia, hinting at the heightened consciousness of the Ethiopian workers and shocked the government.<sup>303</sup>

Although throughout the 1960s Ethiopian labour unions' contacts with the Socialist states remained limited, their outlook remained positive. In the Bloc's analysis, with political parties being illegal in Ethiopia, the labour movement was the only legitimate form of mass civilian organisations, whose sharp numerical increase had a potential for further growth and transformations.<sup>304</sup> Similarly, the exchange of official visits and training was the main form of communication. In 1967, the president of the

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<sup>301</sup> Memo, Karatsanev to Bashev, 15 October 1963, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 19p, d. 27, pr[episka] 501, s. 1, l. 250.

<sup>302</sup> R. Hess, *Ethiopia: the Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca: CUP, 1970), 80-2; cf. P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion* (London: Julian Friedmann Publishers Ltd), 166.

<sup>303</sup> Memo, Karatsanev to Bashev, 5 March 1965, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 21, d. 90, pr. 1079, s. 8.

<sup>304</sup> 'Politická zpráva č. 7,' 7.

Ethiopian labour union Solomon Bayene holidayed in the Soviet Union and the CELU's Secretary-General Fisseha Tsion Tekle attended the celebrations for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution and the Soviets sent to Ethiopia the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Labour Union of the Electrical Industry.<sup>305</sup>

Naturally, more alarming than the overt contacts between CELU leaders and the bloc were the suspected covert approaches of their socialist colleagues as the Confederation's sympathisers were placed in positions where they could cause considerable disorder. The principal danger came from the fact that the Imperial Government's security services were left in the dark about some individuals' involvement in the labour union movement.<sup>306</sup> While CELU was not eager to develop close relations with its Bloc counterparts, it did not avoid establishing and maintaining contacts with them. Despite being largely sporadic and formal in character, the Soviet Union rated the relations with the Ethiopian unions as satisfactory, when account was taken of the Regime's pervading suspicion and the high level of Western involvement in Ethiopia's organised labour.

## II. 4.3 East-West contest in Ethiopia

While the Imperial Regime suspected Moscow of meddling in Ethiopia's internal affairs, it wished to maintain diplomatic relations with the Bloc's states. On the other hand, as Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Romania were seen by the Imperial regime to have acted under Soviet instructions, Addis Ababa feared that through its

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<sup>305</sup> L. Zdravchev, 'Otnosno Otnosheniyata na Sotsialisticheskite strani s Etiopiya,' 8 October 1968, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 24, d. 43, pr. 1246, ss. 10-11, ll. 113-4.

<sup>306</sup> Airgram no. A-529, 'Bloc relations and the Political Potential of Ethiopian Labour,' 27 March 1968, NACP, RG59, b. 2073, CFPF 1967-69, f. POL 15-1 ETH 1-1-68.

European allies,<sup>307</sup> Moscow was bent on indirect penetration. What further complicated Soviet Union's activities in Ethiopia was the fact that Addis Ababa figured in Western plans as well. In Washington, Ethiopia was seen as an important geostrategic hub, which was virtually on the crossroads of three continents - Africa, Europe and Asia. The successful expansion of the broad movement for African independence in 1960 and the inception of the OAU, further justified Washington's ideological and economic penetration of Ethiopia.<sup>308</sup> Accordingly, Soviet Bloc diplomats saw American-led behind-the-scenes influence on Haile Selassie's attitude towards them.<sup>309</sup> This led to the consensus amongst the socialist states' representatives in Addis Ababa that their activities in countering the Western political offensive were unsuccessful.<sup>310</sup>

The Americans were predominately seen as actively engaging in subverting socialist economic initiatives in the country. Ahmed Hassan, a counsellor at the Egypt Embassy, offered an insight into the US efforts to obstruct Soviet Bloc commercial initiatives in Ethiopia. In the mid-1967, in Hassan's account, a representative of some of the largest American private banks, such as Chase Manhattan and First National travelled around Ethiopia, showing special interest in Ethiopian-bloc joint ventures, which became a common form of realisation of trade agreements between Addis Ababa, Prague, Sofia, and Moscow. Allegedly, the American tactical aim was to create a better position to drive the socialist states out of the ventures by buying the Ethiopian stakes in the companies.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> P. Dokuzov, 'Pregled na po-vazhnite tendentsii i sūbitiya ot vūtreshno i vūnshno-politicheski karakter na Etiopiya prez 1966g.,' 9 January 1966, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 23, d. 55, pr. 1039, ss. 4-5, ll. 5-6.

<sup>308</sup> 'Mimořadnā politickā zprāva č. 12, Pronikānī USA do Etiopie,' 5 October 1963, NAČR, f. A ÚV KSČ, Antonín Novotný - Zahraničī, k. 94, a. j. 7, s. 10.

<sup>309</sup> 'Instruksia za rabotata na Posolstvoto na NR Būlgariya v Imperiya Etiopiya,' 7 October 1968, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 24, d. 43, pr. 1235, s. 3, l. 4.

<sup>310</sup> Cipher, Addis Ababa to Belgrade no. 146, 13 April 1966, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Etiopija 1966, fasc. 33, dos[ie]. 10, sig. 414440, s. 1.

<sup>311</sup> Memcon, Iliiev-Hassan, 11 November 1967, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 23, d. 55, pr. 1039, s. 1, l. 166. It seemed that only Yugoslavia remained unaffected because of the special relationship between the leaders of the two countries, which considered themselves as non-aligned. Moreover, as the British observed, it appeared far-fetched to assume that the Yugoslavs were serving the Moscow's ends. See, Letter, Russell to Smith, 13 May 1964, TNA, FO 371/177764, folder NU 103101/1.

Additionally, in the late-1960s, the KGB Residence in Addis Ababa noticed an increase in logistical support rendered to the Ethiopian security services by the US, FRG, and Israel through deliveries of technical equipment and deployment of advisors. The American contingent in Ethiopia alone was estimated at 25-30,000-strong. This was seen as penetrating various government departments, media outlets, schools and universities, military units, and security services.<sup>312</sup> In Moscow's assessment, an important role in meeting the objective of 'compromising and eliminating the relations between Ethiopia and the Socialist countries'<sup>313</sup> was played by the American embassy in Addis Ababa.<sup>314</sup>

American suspicion of the East's covert intentions was not entirely unfounded. The Socialist states also realised that Addis Ababa was turning into Africa's political capital. Importantly, Ethiopia was perceived as 'the only stable strategic position' for the US on the continent.<sup>315</sup> Furthermore, the growing American influence in the country,<sup>316</sup> came to justify Soviet-led attempts to subvert Western interest, aiming to 'strengthen the unity and the authority of the socialist bloc and to prove socialist superiority.'<sup>317</sup> In meeting this objective, in addition to the established StB and KGB residencies,<sup>318</sup> the chief of the IX Department of the Bulgarian State Security Committee (KDS) recommended the installation of a Bulgarian residence in Ethiopia, under the cover of the Embassy and the trade representation, aided by a network of trustworthy Bulgarian

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<sup>312</sup> KGB reference note no. 221, 'O špets-sluzhbach Éfiopii i o deyatel'nosti amerikanskikh predstavitel'stv, nahodyashchikhsya v Éfiopii,' 20 May 1968, A[rhiv] na M[inisterstvoto] na V[ŭtreshnite] R[aboti], f. 9, d. 2572, ch[ast] 1, s. 7, l. 121.

<sup>313</sup> P. Dokuzov, 9 January 1966.

<sup>314</sup> With its 53 members of staff, including 20 diplomats, and 5 agents of the Navy's secret police, according to information obtained by the Soviets, the American Embassy was also used as a cover for agents of the American security services. The CIA resident, who was aided by two coders, served under the guise of the First Secretary for political affairs. See KGB Reference note no. 221, 7.

<sup>315</sup> 'Operativna obstanovka v Etiopiya,' KGB report, 6 October 1970, ANRS, f. 9, d. 2843, t. 1, l. 10.

<sup>316</sup> J. Houska, 'Návrh na zrušení residency v Addis Abebě po linii 4.odboru,' f. I. správny MV, 26 November 1963, ABS, I správa SNB, svazek 11436, s. 1.

<sup>317</sup> Protocol no. 1, Bulgarian Embassy party organisation, 13 January 1964, Ts[entralen] D[ŭrzhaven] A[rhiv], f. 1, op. 51, a[rhivna] e[dinitsa] 246.

<sup>318</sup> The SNB residency was established in 1962 with two secret agents, see Josef Houska, 'Návrh na zrušení residency v Addis Abebě,' s. 1.

specialists working in Ethiopia.<sup>319</sup> In the final analysis, both superpowers had to engage in covert operations in the quest to enhance their respective positions of influence, thus turning Ethiopia into a Cold War battleground. In this confrontational setting, the East European diplomatic representations played an important role in aiding Moscow's regional aims mostly by gathering information through their commercial activities.

#### II. 4.3.1 The volatility of Soviet Bloc business operations in Ethiopia: the ReSeDCo's case

The main domain in which the superpowers and their allies clashed in Ethiopia was the field of economic assistance. As the Bloc was not among Ethiopia's leading commercial partners, the West participated in the majority of trading activities. Moscow concentrated its efforts on developing a broader frame of economic and technical co-operation. Soviet-Bloc's commercial initiatives, however, remained somewhat constrained due to the Addis Ababa's non-aligned stance and lukewarm attitude towards the socialist states.<sup>320</sup>

The opening of the refinery in Assab played an important role in Moscow's developmental plans for Ethiopia. This was a truly co-operative undertaking with various socialist states assuming different responsibilities. While the oil refinery, the power, and water supplies were the Soviet's share, Belgrade took over the customs port and hospitals, and Bulgaria's architectural firm 'Technoexport' planned a 20-year development programme for the town and the region. In this sense, the justification for the construction of the oil refinery on the shore of the Red Sea was more than economic. In addition to strengthening Soviet-Ethiopian ties, it had an important promotional value

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<sup>319</sup> Letter, Chief of 9th Department of First Chief Directorate (PGU), KDS, to the PGU director, 13 January 1969, ANRS, f. 9, d. 2843, ch. I, s. 1, l. 142.

<sup>320</sup> 'Současné sovětsko-etiopské hospodářské styky - výstavba rafinerie nafty v Assabu,' 20 April 1967, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 3, sv. 212/312, no. 7, ss. 1-2.

for Africa.<sup>321</sup> It demonstrated the Soviet Union's ability to provide substantial developmental solutions for the newly established states on the continent. Importantly, there is another explanation for Moscow's interest in embedding a presence in the Assab area which related to military-strategic considerations. The presence of the American Kagnew station in the area further justified the Soviets' resolve to keep a close eye on Washington's designs in the local setting. Lastly, rumours in diplomatic circles of agreement between Washington and Addis Ababa for the setting up of a secret American missile base in Ethiopia,<sup>322</sup> additionally increased the significance for the Soviet-led operation in the country by intensifying the East-West competition in the region.

One joint venture that came under scrutiny by the Ethiopian government and the West was the Ethiopian-Bulgarian 'Red Sea Development Corporation' (ReSeDCo), established in Eritrea in 1963, operating in Asmara and Massawa, both of which played host to important American military installations. This enterprise provided evidence of the nature of Soviet-led Bloc operations in Ethiopia. The communication between the Soviet Union and its European allies demonstrated that the socialist states, in this case Bulgaria, acted as fronting agents who closely consulted their initiatives with Moscow in extending the latter's influence in the country. ReSeDCo's prime focus of economic activity was on shipping, fisheries, and meat packing, but after being accused of smuggling arms into Eritrea,<sup>323</sup> the Americans and the Imperial Regime became highly distrustful of its business. It was, thus, believed that it offered a cover for the Bloc's activities and intelligence gathering in Ethiopia and Africa.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>322</sup> While, this information, provided by a Palace official was dismissed by the Soviets, it hinted at the magnitude of the American stake in Ethiopia see 'Události kolem dohody o US raketové základny,' 26 November 1963, ABS, f. I správa SNB, sv. 11436, s. 1.

<sup>323</sup> NIE, 'Prospects in the Horn of Africa,' 75/76-67, 27 April 1967, NSF, LBJL, b. 8, NIEs, f. 75/76, Horn of Africa.

<sup>324</sup> Airgram No A-33, 'Monthly Summary of Events – March, 1964,' 1 April 1964, NACP, RG59, b. 2148, CFPF 1964-66, f. POL 2 ETH; See also Ivan Karatsanov, 'Otnosno nyakoi vaprosi ot deynostta na "Red Sea",' 25 April 1965, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 21, d. 90, pr. 1078, s. 1.

The Israelis confirmed this line, as Tel Aviv's Ambassador, Divon, known for his good contacts within the Imperial Court,<sup>325</sup> shared with his American colleague, Korry, the conviction that the Russians were using the Bulgarians to lay the groundwork for expanding the Kremlin's position in Ethiopia's domestic affairs.<sup>326</sup> Korry's assessment concurred with that of the Israelis by asserting that the Bulgarians were a 'useful tool' in the Soviets' hands. In addition, Bulgaria, as a small state, appeared to represent less of a threat to Ethiopia. To strengthen the view from the ground, John Root of the Bureau of African Affairs at the State Department, agreed with Korry's conclusion that in engaging with its Bloc allies Moscow, both directly and indirectly, had established Ethiopia as its 'priority target in Africa.'<sup>327</sup> The increased commercial activity of the Bloc states in Ethiopia in the mid-1960s, at a time when Soviet involvement was closely watched by the Imperial regime and the Western powers, suggests that Moscow aimed to take advantage of Ethiopia's need for industrial development taking into account Addis Ababa's strategy of balancing between the East and the West. In addition, in furthering its aims along the path of least resistance, the Kremlin tried not to draw too much attention to its actions, avoiding any risks that may involve it in direct confrontation with its main adversary.

Apart from the Israeli and American sides, Soviet Bloc activities in Ethiopia, and especially the Ethiopian-Bulgarian enterprise in Eritrea, suffered a sudden attack from a rather unexpected party. An Albanian brochure 'The Soviet Union's Great Plot Against Africa,' published in 1969 and posted from Tirana to all Socialist Embassies in Addis

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<sup>325</sup> Both Ethiopia and Israel regarded one another as strategic allies by feeling surrounded by hostile Muslim countries, and were fearful of the expansion of Soviet influence. Israel's primary concern in the Horn of Africa was to prevent the closure of the Bab el Mandeb straits, thus retaining freedom of navigation through the Red Sea and the Straits of Tiran. See E. Nadelmann, 'Israel and Black Africa,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1981): 194.

<sup>326</sup> E. Korry, 'Communist Interests in Ethiopia,' 21 December 1965, NACP, RG59, LF, AF 1958-66, b. 19, f. POL 17 – Communist Bloc Ethiopia 1963.

<sup>327</sup> J. Root, 'Bulgarian Fronting for Russian Interests in Ethiopia,' 23 December 1965, NACP, RG59, LF, AF 1958-66, b. 19, f. POL 17 – Communist Bloc Ethiopia 1963.

Ababa, claimed that ReSeDCo, served as a cover for the illegal import of weapons in support of the Eritrean Liberation Front. The Albanian brochure claimed that the joint company failed ‘so pathetically’ as a business enterprise, not only because of the faltering of its legitimate business, but also because of its illegal activities with the ELF. The latter were so poorly conducted that several shipments addressed to ReSeDCo, marked as containing sewing machines, were opened by the Ethiopian port authorities and weapons and ammunition were found instead. At the time, the Albanians alleged, it was the Soviet Embassy in Addis Ababa that stood behind ReSeDCo’s operations, as the Soviet technicians, who were previously working at the oil refinery in Assab and were engaging with the ELF, were told to leave. The Ethiopians’ mistake, therefore, was to let the Bulgarians in after expelling the Russian technicians from Assab as both countries ‘were fingers of the same hand.’ In addition, the fate of the joint venture demonstrated that the Bulgarians were unable to govern such a complicated entity. Consequently, in 1967, the Kremlin authorised the creation of the Ethiopian-Soviet company (EFSO), which was established ‘for the implementation of Soviet exports of machinery, equipment, and various commodities to Ethiopia.’<sup>328</sup> Still, the Albanians saw that the new joint venture served the same objectives as ReSeDCo’s, this time only to be managed directly by the KGB.<sup>329</sup>

In support of the Albanian account of the allegedly Soviet led-Bulgarian operation in Assab, Sofia’s Ambassador, Karatsanov, informed the Foreign Minister, Ivan Bashev, in a personal, secret ciphered telegram that, in December 1963, he and the Defence Ministry representative, Panov, had met with the Soviet Ambassador and his Military Attaché. The central point of their talk had been Ethiopia’s important strategic place in Africa vis-à-vis the Middle East and Europe. During the meeting the Soviets

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<sup>328</sup> TASS, ‘Sozdanie smeshannoï Sovetsko-Éfiopskoï kompanii,’ 8 March 1967, GARF, f. R-4459, op. 43, d. 7291, l. 160.

<sup>329</sup> Excerpt from ‘The Soviet Union’s Great Plot Against Africa,’ 5 January 1969, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 20p, d. 12, pr. 209, s. 2, l. 40.

insisted on sending Bulgarian specialists, one in Addis Ababa and several in Asmara which would help them in their work, as they were hindered in their activities by the Americans and the Ethiopians.<sup>330</sup> As a result, the Bulgarians planned to launch a fishing joint venture. When they shared the idea with the head of the Soviet delegation to the Sixth Session of the ECA, Akhripov, however, he was doubtful of the success of the enterprise. In his opinion, the Red Sea seemed an unwise choice for this kind of operation,<sup>331</sup> as any potential problems in the economic viability of the project would become an embarrassment and liability for the entire Bloc. This statement of the Soviet representative may serve as an example of how Moscow saw economic assistance as a penetration tool, and, on the other hand, hints at the interconnectedness between the Bloc's activities and the Kremlin's local conduct.

Eventually, the Bulgarians found themselves involved not only in a troubled economic enterprise, but also in a partnership with local businessmen who were accused of anti-government activity and connections with the ELF.<sup>332</sup> An editorial in *The Ethiopian Herald* of 17 June condemned the subversive activity in Africa by countries, 'undertaking revolutions on a world scale' by 'arming separatist elements, while declaring that they do not want to interfere with internal affairs.' Apparently, the Socialist countries in general and 'ReSeDCo' in particular, were the focal point for this material as it went on to stress that the 'trend was to engage in actions under the cover of modern economic penetration.'<sup>333</sup> This assessment made Sofia extra careful in its dealings with the Eritrean liberation movement. In this regard, the KDS instructed the Foreign Minister that the Bulgarian official representatives and ReSeDCo's management should not

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<sup>330</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Sofia no. 6, 9 January 1964, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh[ifrogrami], op[is] 5sh, d[elo] 8, a[rkhivna] e[dinitsa] 127, ss. 1-2, ll. 6-7.

<sup>331</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Sofia no. 56, 2 March 1964, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 8, a.e. 127, s. 1.

<sup>332</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Sofia no. 100, 6 May 1965, DAMVnR-RB f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 8, a.e. 228, s. 1; cf. CIPHER, Addis Ababa - Sofia no. 167, 20 August 1966, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 102, a.e. 326, s. 1.

<sup>333</sup> CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Sofia no. 232, 17 June 1966, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 102, a.e. 326, s. 1.

engage in any activities which would make Addis Ababa doubtful of Bulgaria's 'sincere intentions of developing economic ties' with Ethiopia. Accordingly, the State Security Committee recommended to the Foreign Ministry the rejection of the requests of the prominent Eritrean political leader Tedla Bairu for material support and his son's admission to a Bulgarian university.<sup>334</sup>

Additionally, some sources even ascribed the student strike that took place in Asmara in March 1965 to ReSeDCo's 'long hand.' Further, some of the Bulgarians, involved in the company found themselves under American surveillance. The co-director, Kolarov, shared with Ambassador Karatsanev that Eritrean rebels chose not to attack the Bulgarians, their cars, and any property owned by ReSeDCo, which to him showed that the company, without his knowledge, had maintained some contacts with the Eritrean rebels.<sup>335</sup> It appears that even if the company was involved in illegal business with the ELF, the Embassy, or part of its staff were not informed. Consequently, the joint venture's endless problems provoked the Bulgarian leader, Todor Zhivkov, into ordering his ambassador to Ethiopia to inform the Soviet representative about BCP CC Politburo's decision for ReSeDCo's liquidation. In addition, Vladov informed Teplov that the Americans, led by military-strategic considerations, showed interest in buying the company,<sup>336</sup> thus driving the Bulgarians out of Eritrea. The ReSeDCo's story demonstrates that while Moscow attempted to take a low key by letting the East European states engage in the local setting, allowing them a certain degree of initiative, it fully realised the pitfalls, associated with the potentially harmful image of its Bloc allies as covering agents to the Kremlin's regional designs. In addition, the complex political

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<sup>334</sup> Letter, KDS Chairman to Foreign Minister, 20 November 1967, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 23, d. 55, pr. 1051, s. 1.

<sup>335</sup> I. Karatsanev, 'Otnosno nyakoi vaprosi ot deynostta na Red Sea,' 25 April 1965, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 21, d. 90, pr. 1078, s. 2, l. 51.

<sup>336</sup> CIPHER, Vladov to Zhivkov no. 92, 25 December 1968, DAMvNR RB, f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 160, a.e. 520, s. 1.

situation in Ethiopia made the Bloc's joint-ventures in the country an increasingly perilous endeavour with potentially harmful effects for Moscow's objectives.

## II. 5. Eritrea

Addis Ababa's problems with the periphery, and especially with Eritrea, seriously complicated external powers' activities in the country. Eritrea was an apparently sensitive area not only for the Americans and the Russians, but also for the Imperial Regime. The presence in the province of unresolved territorial ambitions caused the Emperor's deep concern about any foreign economic involvement there. Moreover, the political support for the Eritrean rebels, provided by Moscow's Arab allies and the influx of military arms made in Eastern-Europe, increased Haile Selassie's distrust of Soviet Bloc operations. Besides, when it came to inferred Soviet-led involvement in the Eritrea, ReSeDCo's case was only the tip of the iceberg. By 1963, it became clear that the rigidity of the Horn's border disputes made Moscow's mission of getting along with both Ethiopia and Somalia a rather difficult task. While agreeing to provide arms to Somalia, Soviet relations with Ethiopia stagnated.

Consequently, Addis Ababa's ties with Washington began to recover from their low point of 1959. The United States had developed in Eritrea strong military positions and had an interest in their preservation.<sup>337</sup> According to a series of secret agreements signed in 1962, 1963 and 1964, the US offered to speed up the delivery of arms contained in the 1960 commitment, providing 'civic action equipment' and accepting an Ethiopian request for a squadron of twelve F-5 aircraft. Reassured by Washington's support, the

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<sup>337</sup> 'Eritrejský problém a současná vnitropolitická situace – politická zpráva č. 16,' 29 July 1970, NAČR, f. A ÚV KSČ, Gustav Husák, k. 349, sv. 982, a. j. 9904, s. 3.

Emperor had seemingly little incentive for deepening relations with the USSR.<sup>338</sup> As soon as the Soviets began to ship military equipment to Somalia, Marshal Grechko paid visits to Mogadishu and Addis Ababa. The Emperor, true to his non-aligned policy, rejected the offer reportedly extended by the Marshal for the provision of ‘all the arms’ the Ethiopians needed in exchange of their expulsion of the Americans from Ethiopia and Kagnew.<sup>339</sup> Grechko’s visit was a significant move that showed the potential motivational role played by the Soviet military in Moscow’s regional interests. The Marshal’s trip to the Horn was an acknowledgement of the locale’s strategic significance to Moscow’s regional plans and the need to challenge the Western military-strategic stake.

The 1952 UN’s decision to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia triggered tensions which were bound to have dire consequences for the regional stability in the long term. The federation caused a wave of refugees, opposing the union, composed of Muslim political leaders to flee to Cairo, which along with Damask later played a leading role in assisting the Eritrean movement. In addition, another influential group, which fled Eritrea in the early 1950s, was the semi-nomadic Beja tribes who lived on both sides of the Eritrean-Sudanese border. Following clashes with the Ethiopian army, from 1952 some tribes were forced to move to Sudan and their raids into Ethiopia gradually took the form of a challenge to Ethiopian authority. Such raids could be considered as the origin of the Eritrean Liberation Front’s rural guerrilla activities.<sup>340</sup>

Consistent with the UN sanctions, Eritrea formed an integral part of Ethiopia, Moscow was reluctant, therefore, to support directly the Eritreans in agreement with the

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<sup>338</sup> Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 52.

<sup>339</sup> Testimony of E. Kerry before the subcommittee on African Affairs of the committee on foreign relations united states senate ninety-fourth congress, 45.

<sup>340</sup> Mordechai Abir, ‘The Contentious Horn of Africa,’ *Conflict Studies*, no 24 (1972): 2; On early development of Eritrean liberation movement see Clapham, ‘The Horn of Africa,’ in *Conflict in Africa*, 73-6 and Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 104-9.

principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Arab states aligned with Moscow, notably Syria, Iraq, Nasser's Egypt, South Yemen, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Gaddafi's Libya, and Sudan (prior to Nimeiry's disenchantment with the Soviets), acting in their own interests, reportedly supplied the Eritrean separatists with Soviet and Czechoslovakian arms.<sup>341</sup> However, it is unclear if the Kremlin was openly involved in persuading its Arab partners to provide military support to the Eritreans.

It was difficult to persuade the Emperor, however, that Moscow was not involved in any way in the Eritrean rebellion. This suspicion was founded on Moscow's ties with Syria, which emerged as a close ally of the ELF that was formally established in 1961 and launched a military offensive against Ethiopian forces in that year. Initially, the ELF's impact was limited by its inability to obtain external support and the effectiveness of the Israeli-trained Ethiopian counter-insurgency units. In 1964, Syria became the first country to grant the ELF direct material assistance, which gave the front a remarkable boost in military strength and confidence. Between 1964 and 1967, the front's forces grew from a few hundred, armed with obsolete weapons, to about 2,000-strong with relatively modern weapons, such as AK-47s, Czech Stens, British Enfields, an assortment of captured US M-1s, Chinese rockets and mortars.<sup>342</sup> While Syria had reasons of its own for supporting the Eritrean struggle – Damask erroneously heralded the ELF as an Arab liberation movement, fighting Ethiopia, a reactionary pro-Israeli regime – it was assumed that its actions probably had the indirect support of Moscow.<sup>343</sup>

Nevertheless, the most oft cited circumstantial factor pointing at Moscow's indirect support of ELF was the fact that many of the weapons the Eritreans received via Syria

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<sup>341</sup> Elrich, 'The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,' 132.

<sup>342</sup> R. Sherman, *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 74.

<sup>343</sup> H. Elrich, *The Struggle over Eritrea* (Stanford: Hoover, 1983), 56.

originated from Czechoslovakia.<sup>344</sup> Prague's representatives in Ethiopia, however, hinted at the fact that the smuggling of Czechoslovakian-made weapons into Eritrea was done without Prague's knowledge.<sup>345</sup> Accordingly, it was understood that in early 1968 Prague decided not to continue its contacts with the ELF. The Czechoslovakians recommended that the Bloc should not overestimate the Front's role. In their assessment, the Eritrean movement could become a considerable force if Addis Ababa's power declined.<sup>346</sup> This conclusion, reported by their Bulgarian colleagues, was unlikely to be an outcome of individual evaluation, as further corroboration in this regard could be found in Sofia's cautious attitudes towards maintaining contacts with members of the Eritrean front.

Without conclusive evidence, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the Soviets might have been involved in Eritrean dissidence. The Americans observed that Soviet officials regularly visited and distributed propaganda material in Eritrea, along with other parts of the Empire. Again, it was the Americans, who, despite their presence in Eritrea admitted that there were no hard facts proving that the Soviets were supporting Eritrean rebels with arms or external aid in a bid to foment revolutionary fervour in the province. Rather, as Korry claimed, the Soviet tactics appeared to be directed towards exploiting unsettled conditions in Eritrea 'by laying groundwork for the future when Haile Selassie departs and greater dissidence may be incited.' At the time, Moscow was attempting to make contacts, create sympathetic links with disaffected elements, and

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<sup>344</sup> According to press statements by a former ELF activist, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Sudan provided arms and financial support to the Eritrean separatists and the larger part of the weapons were of Czechoslovak origin - see CIPHER, Addis Ababa to Sofia no. 48, 18 May 1967, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 5sh, d. 131, a.e. 417, s. 1.

<sup>345</sup> 'Zaznam,' 19 March 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T Etiopie, 1965-9, 1, sv. 212/112, no. 4, s. 2.

<sup>346</sup> L. Zdravchev, 'Otnosno fronta za osvobozhdenie na Eritrea i poseshtenieto na delegatsiyata na Fronta v Chehoslovakiya ot 27-30 noemvri 1967 godina,' 9 January 1968, DAMVnR-RB, op. 24, d. 43, pr. 1234, s. 3, l. 37.

organise small groups, which might form the nucleus of a pro-communist element in future.<sup>347</sup>

As regards the Eritrean separatists, Moscow adopted, yet again, a rather careful approach. This accorded with the Kremlin leaders' general line in the area by which they aimed not to become directly involved in the complex relations between the various parties on the ground. However, Moscow's Arab allies had documented contacts with Eritrean rebels and substantial quantities of Bloc-built military material were introduced to the scene. There is no direct evidence, however, that such arms were imported through official channels. In an attempt to preserve their relations with Addis Ababa, both Sofia and Prague instructed their local representatives to be extra careful when carrying out contacts that might have links to the Eritrean movement. These actions suggest that contrary to rumours about direct Soviet Bloc involvement in the Eritrean rebellion, Moscow and its European allies' stance was far more cautious, thereby confirming the Narkomindel line in the Kremlin's foreign policy.

## II. 6. Horn of Africa's Arms Race

Moscow's careful approach in the Horn could be further exemplified by its attempts to suppress Somalia's territorial ambitions. In the late 1960s, the presidential victory of Ali Shermarke led to a relative calm in the relations between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa. The Kremlin welcomed the development, as it opposed the spread of the local conflict. However, Moscow's cautious approach in the 1964 Ethiopian-Somali border clashes strongly disappointed Mogadishu which associated the Kremlin's support with the

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<sup>347</sup> E. Korry, 'Soviet Activities Eritrea,' Despatch 903, 11 March 1964, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1964-66, b. 2152, f. POL 23 - 9 ETH 1/1/64.

ultimate victory of their cause.<sup>348</sup> After Nasser's debacle in the Six Day War, which occurred almost simultaneously with Shermarke's electoral victory over Aden Abdulla Osman on 10 June 1967, Mogadishu began to question its reliance on the Soviets and embarked on a course of strengthening ties with the West.<sup>349</sup>

## II. 6.1 The Shermarke-Egal Détente

In the summer of 1967, the newly elected Somali president nominated Muhammad Egal as Prime Minister. The perennial Pan-Somali ideal offered the new Somali Premier a host of unresolved foreign issues. The clandestinely supported Somali guerrilla campaign in Northern Kenya had made a little headway. As for the situation in the other area contested by the Somalis - the French-controlled Djibouti - matters became even worse. Following riots during President de Gaulle's visit there in August 1966 and the subsequent French promise of a referendum to decide the future of the territory, Ethiopia and Somalia resurrected longstanding claims to the area. The referendum took place on 19 March 1967 in rather dubious circumstances, and the majority of the population voted for continued association with France. Somalia, however, denounced the result as a fraud.<sup>350</sup>

With so little to show for the bold pursuit of the Somali cause by his predecessors, Egal embarked on a course of regional co-operation, encompassing Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia.<sup>351</sup> In addition, he restored the ties with the UK, severed in 1963 following Kenya's independence. This aimed to alter the Western perception of

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<sup>348</sup> R. Thurston, 'Détente in the Horn,' *Africa Report* 14, no. 2 (1969): 7.

<sup>349</sup> T. Hughes, 'New Somali President – New Uncertainties in the Horn of Africa,' INR Intelligence Note no. 559, 3 July 1967, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2086, f. POL 15-1 SOMALI 1/1/67.

<sup>350</sup> Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 55-6; See also V. Thompson and R. Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa* (Stanford: SUP, 1968), 117.

<sup>351</sup> D. Laitin and S. Samatar, *Somalia, Nation in a Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 139.

Somalia's increasing dependence on the USSR.<sup>352</sup> In further diminishing Somalia's reliance on the Soviet Union for military assistance and training,<sup>353</sup> Egal also tried to engage the country's Western-trained and equipped police force as a counterweight to the Moscow-equipped army.<sup>354</sup> The Somali Premier, thus, promoted a course bent on downplaying traditional irredentism and sought to promote détente in the Horn, by pressing for the reduction of military expenditure, while promoting greater economic development.<sup>355</sup>

## II. 6.2 Moscow and the Horn's arms race

The local détente was in step with the Kremlin's efforts to curb the arms race in the Horn, as Egal's conciliatory course agreed with Soviet's objective of bringing the Ethiopian-Somali relations to moderation. Prior to Shermarke-Egal's arrival on the political stage in the summer of 1967, Moscow attempted several unpopular measures to restrain Somali local ambitions. In March, the Kremlin decreased levels of oil deliveries which threatened to immobilise the Somali Army during the Djibouti referendum crisis.<sup>356</sup> Back in September 1966, the visit of the then Somali President, Aden Abdulla Osman to Moscow failed to secure commitments for more military material. The Kremlin rejected the Somali plea for additional deliveries, as it wished to avoid further aggravation of the unstable situation in the Horn. More importantly, Moscow did not want to send the

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<sup>352</sup> I. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 203.

<sup>353</sup> 'Visit of Prime Minister Egal of the Somali Republic, March 14-15, 1968,' 5 March 1968, LBJL, NSF, Country File, b. 99, Somalia, f. Somali Republic, Visit of PM Egal [2 of 3] 3/14-15/68.

<sup>354</sup> Y. Etinger, *Mezhgosudarstvennyye otnosheniya v Afrike* (Moskva: Nauka, 1972), 82, cited in R. Remnek, 'The Soviet-Somali,' 61.

<sup>355</sup> 'Visit of Prime Minister Egal,' LBJL.

<sup>356</sup> Cable, US Embassy, Moscow to Secretary of State no. 37471, 13 March 1967, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2071, f. POL 7 ETH 3/1/67.

wrong signal that it supported Somalia's belligerency towards its neighbours.<sup>357</sup> Besides, the Kremlin had warned Osman that the arms they provided to Somalia were only for defensive purposes.<sup>358</sup> Moscow advised Mogadishu to be more realistic, and to concentrate on solving internal political problems and improve the economic situation of the country. In the Kremlin's opinion, Somalia's 'fruitless disputes' with her neighbours could only exhaust the country economically and isolate her politically.<sup>359</sup>

Consequently, the Russians sought a diplomatic back channel through which to control the influx of arms into the region. On 9 September 1966, Moscow's Ambassador Dyukarev asked his American colleague, Thurston, about the US' provision of F-5 jets to Ethiopia, saying that the Somalis, dissatisfied with the deliveries of the older MIG 17s, demanded the more sophisticated MIG 21 fighters.<sup>360</sup> Then he sounded out his counterpart, allegedly without Moscow's sanction, as to whether both parties could do something to limit the levels of arms supplies to both African states.<sup>361</sup> Arguably, Dyukarev's move could be seen as a reflection of opinions within the Soviet MFA which were critical to the military's pushiness. Nevertheless, the US State Department, instructed its Mogadishu representative to confirm in principle Washington's willingness to curb the arms race in the Horn as there was no new agreement for Soviet arms deliveries.<sup>362</sup> Additionally, the State Department preferred the local states to launch this initiative, rather than to have it imposed on them.<sup>363</sup> Moscow, as a result, played a tacit, yet critical role in motivating the local détente. Admittedly, the Soviet line in restraining

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<sup>357</sup> NIE, 'Prospects in the Horn of Africa,' 75/76-67, 27 April 1967, LBJL, NSF, NIEs, b. 8, f. 75/76, Horn of Africa.

<sup>358</sup> Memo [Haile Selassie's visit to Yugoslavia], 26 October 1966, AJ, f. 837, KPR I-3-a/24-20, s. 5.

<sup>359</sup> 'Statní návštěva somálského prezidenta Osmana v SSSR - mimořádná politická zpráva č. 12,' 25. October 1966, AMZV, f. TO-T Somálsko, 1965-9, 1, sv. 239/311, no. 16, s. 1.

<sup>360</sup> For details about deliveries of Soviet military material to Somalia, please refer to table 1 below.

<sup>361</sup> Cable, Mogadiscio [sic] 596, 9 September 1966, LBJL, NSF, b. 99, Country File, Somalia, f. Somalia, vol. I, 1/64-5/68.

<sup>362</sup> Cable, State 76805, 1 November 1966, LBJL, NSF, Country File, b. 99, Somalia, f. Somalia, Vol. I, 1/64-5/68.

<sup>363</sup> Cable, State 50340, 20 September 1966, LBJL, NSF, Country File, b. 99, Somalia, f. Somalia, Vol. I, 1/64-5/68.

Somalia's territorial ambitions coincided with domestic developments that led to a constructive desire in Mogadishu, albeit temporary, to normalise relations with Addis Ababa.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>Somalia</b>
Tank, light	54	21
Tank, medium	0	60
Armoured personnel carriers	26	130-50
Field artillery	134	92-6
Antitank artillery	12	66
Antiaircraft artillery	9	118-24
Early warning radar	0	4
Tactical fighter, propeller	43	0
Tactical fighter, jet	19	5

**Table 1.** Assessment of the Armed forces of the Somali Republic and Ethiopia<sup>364</sup>

## II. 6.3 Renewed deterioration in Somali-Ethiopian relations

Nevertheless, Moscow's initiatives aimed at curtailing the Horn's arms race fell victim to the persisting nature of the Ethiopian-Somali border issues. In Somalia, the soft course towards Ethiopia provoked negative reaction within the military. The renewal of open hostility between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu was sparked by a theft in the summer of 1968 of 200 head of Somali livestock by Ethiopian rustlers. In return, Somali nomads retaliated by killing two Ethiopian policemen who were raising the Ethiopian flag at the police station at Ferfer, near the border. Somali military units were scrambled on 14 July, and artillery divisions were positioned within nine miles of the Ethiopian border. The Somali cabinet held emergency meetings on 13 and 14 July, and the army appealed for volunteers. The situation further deteriorated when it became known that Ethiopia, after failing to secure American arms, had purchased four British Canberra bombers, the first

<sup>364</sup> Special DIA Intelligence Bulletin, 19 March 1965, LoC, Manuscript Division, The Papers of W. Averell Harriman, b. 545, Special Files, Public Service, f. 9 - African Chiefs of Mission, May 1965, 2.

of which were scheduled for delivery on 21 July. This had intensified Somali army pressure for new equipment, especially Soviet MiG-21s. As a result, the winds on both sides of the border were blowing strongly against détente<sup>365</sup> and more Russian military equipment was delivered to Somalia in late October and early November 1968.<sup>366</sup>

In Somalia's internal affairs, Egal's conciliatory foreign policy was viewed by army officers as an attack on their privileges and prerogatives. The local détente also meant a dampening down of an incipient arms race and a tight, closely watched budget for security expenditure. Moreover, in February 1969, Egal was held responsible for the removal of the popular and competent Police Commander Mohamed Abshir. Importantly, during the national elections, the government established close political control over the police, whose morale plummeted. The widespread violence and corruption during the March 1969 elections were the most extensive since independence. On 15 October, Shermarke was shot, allegedly by a member of the paramilitary Mobile Police Force, while he was on tour in the drought-stricken north. The assassination touched off internal strife, which resulted from the northern clans' dissatisfaction with the local détente.<sup>367</sup> As at the beginning of the decade, these local developments were responsible for setting the pace of external outlook towards the region. The end of the short-lived Ethiopian-Somali détente led to a gradual intensification of superpowers' involvement in the early 1970s. Both local parties needed their respective patrons to underwrite their security needs against external threat.

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<sup>365</sup> T. Hughes, 'Somalia/Ethiopia: The Fuse Has Been Relit,' INR Intelligence Note no. 574, 22 July 1968, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2076, f. POL AFF and REL ETH-SOMALI.

<sup>366</sup> JIC (68) (N) 125, 12 December 1968, TNA, CAB 163/97, fo. 48.

<sup>367</sup> Memo, Eliot to Kissinger, 3 November 1969, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2087, f. POL 21 SOMALI 1/1/67.

## II. 7. Conclusion

Following the initial impetus in its relations with Somalia, culminating in the 1963 arms deal, Moscow shifted its outlook and embarked on a course of maintaining a presence in the strategic Horn. Engagement with both Somalia and Ethiopia made it necessary for the Soviet leadership not only to understand the basic internal problems in both countries, but also to pay extra attention to their unresolved border issues. The outbreak of hostility between the neighbouring states in the mid-1960s presented the Kremlin with the opportunity to establish itself as a force of mediation. Moscow refrained from supporting Somali irredentism, and tried to engage both countries in finding an amicable solution to their problems.

In Ethiopia, despite the collision with the Imperial regime over the student riots, Moscow considered its efforts at assuaging Haile Selassie's political reservations as satisfactory. The Kremlin's attempt to engage its European allies had mixed results. At the end of the decade, the Russians found their position in Ethiopia under attack from both the West and the Imperial Regime. In addition, the initially optimistic prospect of Addis Ababa's development into Africa's political centre began to lose momentum. As early as 1963, it was clear to some Bloc representatives that, despite Addis Ababa's hosting of the OAU Secretariat, it could not be the centre of pan-African affairs. Most of the young African states had some reservations about Ethiopia's 'absolutist regime.' This undermined Ethiopia's influence in Africa.<sup>368</sup> At the same time, Moscow's involvement in Somalia failed to achieve substantial results, mainly owing to difficulties in the implementation of economic assistance.

In regional terms the 1963 arms deal with Mogadishu was never fully realised and Moscow soon found itself promoting local arms limitations, and coming out strongly in

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<sup>368</sup> Houska, 'Návrh na zrušení residency v Addis Abebě,' 1-2.

favour of Ethiopian-Somali détente. After Moscow failed to obtain concrete results in attracting active American participation in curbing the influx of military material into both Horn states, the logic of regional dynamics tipped in favour of reinvigorating the perennial border tensions. The process of détente led to a period of political crisis in the Somali capital, which culminated in the assassination of the Somali President on 15 October 1969. Widespread corruption paved the way for the army's rise. On 21 October, the Army leader, Mohamed Siad Barre, launched a bloodless coup. The new military regime eventually led to the establishment of much closer, albeit complicated, relations with Moscow in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the Kremlin attempted to maintain a presence in both Ethiopia and Somalia for as long as the local setting permitted. As a result, Moscow's representatives found themselves under increased suspicion in both countries, which further justified the need of continuing the cautious line in a significantly changed local, Horn, and regional, Middle Eastern, setting.

## Chapter Three

### **Engaging Mogadishu:**

October 1969 – March 1976

#### III. 1. Introduction

At the end-1960s, the wider Horn, including Sudan, witnessed major political shifts as left-wing military seized power in Mogadishu and Khartoum. This ran in parallel with another key regional development - Muammar al-Gaddafi's rise to power in Libya in 1969. These opportunities, seemingly developed without Moscow's active participation, coincided with the diminution of the Kremlin's influence in the Middle East. During the period, the Soviet military-strategic complex played a decisive role in informing the Kremlin's regional policies by emphasising the increased value of the Indian Ocean in international affairs. Somalia, owing to her geographic location, therefore, occupied a central place in the Soviet navy's regional plans. They culminated with the visit of the Soviet Defence Minister Marshal Grechko, in 1972, after which the Soviet-Somali military co-operation received a strong boost. Interestingly, Moscow's active role in Mogadishu did not occur immediately after General Siad Barre's coup d'état on 21 October 1969. Only after the loss of the Soviet stake in Egypt and the gradual ousting of Moscow from the Israeli-Arab mediation process, did the Kremlin intensify its efforts in Somalia.

Moscow's pursuit of geo-strategic aims in Somalia, however, encountered strong domestic opposition in the country. Mogadishu's long-lasting aspiration to maintain a neutralist foreign policy severely limited the Soviet influence. While the Kremlin provided substantial quantities of military arms to Somalia, it played a decisive role in restraining

Mogadishu's territorial ambitions. Additionally, the Kremlin appeared to be well informed about the domestic scene, and kept a vigilant eye on Siad Barre's policies. Besides, Moscow did not object to Mogadishu's plans to join the Arab League about which it knew in advance. Somali plans to enter the League coincided with Moscow's desire to re-establish its prestige within the Arab countries after the Six Day War and the expulsion of Soviet personnel from Egypt.

Thus, Moscow aimed to strengthen its position in Somalia as much as the setting permitted. Moreover, rather than aiding Siad's expansionist plans, the Soviet military infrastructure projects along the Indian Ocean coast were more oriented towards serving Moscow's regional objectives. While the Kremlin did not feel it should inform Mogadishu of the real purpose of the military installations it introduced to Somalia, Siad skilfully used them to his own advantage as a political instrument for attracting American interest. A similar mismatch between Moscow and Mogadishu occurred with the signing of the Friendship Treaty in 1974. While the Kremlin intended to use it for strengthening the ties between the two countries, at the same time as creating legal restraints to Somali territorial ambitions, Mogadishu thought that, with the Treaty it had obtained the Soviet support for their territorial claims. Soon, it became clear that Mogadishu had misread Soviet intentions as political changes in Ethiopia diverted Moscow's attention from Mogadishu to its neighbour.

### III. 2. Changes in wider regional aspect and Soviet involvement in the Horn

The end of the 1960s offered the Kremlin new opportunities in the wider Horn. The 'anti-imperialist revolutions' of Ga'afar Nimeiry in Sudan and Siad Barre in Somalia in 1969, as well as the British withdrawal from Aden, presented the Russians with the chance to

strengthen their presence in the region. Despite the opening of the window of opportunity, Moscow's effort in this respect could be described, at best, as cautious. In Khartoum, the new regime vowed to establish 'relations of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.'<sup>369</sup> To Moscow, the importance of Nimeiry's leftist orientation was further amplified by the fact that Sudan shared a border with another Soviet-supplied state at the time - Egypt. Moreover, the two Northeast African countries proposed a union with Libya which had also experienced a radical pan-Arab coup in 1969.<sup>370</sup> Additionally, in November 1967, after a 128-year presence, the British withdrew from Aden, which led to the creation of the People's Republic of South Yemen. In March 1968, a Soviet military mission travelled to South Yemen. In June 1969, a military coup promoted President Salim Rubayi Ali, who favoured the Chinese model of development. Still, the Secretary-General of the Yemeni National Liberation Front, Abal Fattah Ismail, aimed to continue PRDY's affiliation with the Soviets.<sup>371</sup> This provided the Soviets with a chance to take advantage of the situation and establish a presence in Aden following the British withdrawal.

These developments significantly affected the overall balance of forces in the Horn, creating conditions for the revitalisation of Moscow's policy in the region. This prompted Sergei Sinitsyn to conclude that the changing configuration of foreign involvement in the region and the subsequent spread of Soviet military presence in the Horn, which once was under the West's full command, had not only regional importance, but were also seen in a broader East-West context.<sup>372</sup> The violent leadership convulsions in Khartoum, however, caused the Soviets to lose their influence in Sudan by 1971, and a year later Moscow was to suffer a similar fate in Egypt at the hands of Anwar Sadat. The

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<sup>369</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 157-8.

<sup>370</sup> See P. Woodward, *The Horn of Africa* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 136-7, and A. Yodfat, 'The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa,' *Northeast African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1979/80): 6.

<sup>371</sup> G. Payton, 'The Somali Coup of 1969,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (1980): 499-500.

<sup>372</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 158-9.

overall decline in Soviet standing in Egypt prompted the Soviet navy planners to look for alternative bases, aimed at increasing Soviet maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean. Importantly, these facilities were also to monitor the American presence in the economically vital waterways between the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf. Somalia's long coast on the Indian Ocean provided an excellent possibility for realising both aims.

### III. 2.1 Soviet Union and the Middle East Crises, 1967-73

Gradually, the decline of Soviet influence in the Middle East increased the Horn's strategic importance to the Kremlin. In the post-WWII period, Moscow's involvement in the Middle East was marked by peaks and temporary setbacks, by periods of vigour alternating with quiet, yet persistent build-ups.<sup>373</sup> In the 1967 Six Day War, the Kremlin made it clear that the Soviet Union would not be directly drawn into the fighting. Consequently, the Soviet-equipped Arab armies were shattered by the Israeli offensive.<sup>374</sup> Since neither Soviet weapons nor diplomacy succeeded in protecting the Arab states, the outcome of the war marked 'the beginning of the end of communist influence in the Middle East.'<sup>375</sup> On 28 September 1970, the death of Egypt's President Nasser exposed the Kremlin to additional pressure. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, was no longer a 'loyal friend' of the Soviets, increasingly looking towards the Americans. In July 1972, Sadat finally decided that drastic measures were required on his part as the Soviets appeared to be unable to guarantee that Egypt would not be militarily defeated in an event of a future war against the US-supported Israel. Consequently, all Soviet military and technical advisors, said to range from 15,000 to 20,000, were ordered to leave

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<sup>373</sup> Ilana Dimant-Kass, 'The Soviet Military and Soviet Policy in the Middle East 1970-73,' *Soviet Studies* 26, no. 4 (1974): 503.

<sup>374</sup> E. Schoenberger and S. Reich, 'Soviet Policy in the Middle East,' *MERIP Reports*, no. 39 (1975): 17-8.

<sup>375</sup> V. Garin, *Slovo i Delo* (Rostov-na-Don: Feniks, 2010), 369. See also G. Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 68.

Egypt.<sup>376</sup> Following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Kremlin was gradually excluded from the Middle Eastern peace process in which the US mediated bilateral accords between Egypt and Israel; the parties were engaged in a direct game and did not need the Soviet's restraining role.<sup>377</sup>

The expulsion of the Soviet advisors from Egypt and the gradual diminishing of the Soviet role in the Middle East since 1972 modified the pattern of Soviet presence in the wider region. The Kremlin shifted its focus from the core of the Arab world to its periphery, with Iraq, PDRY, and Somalia taking the centre-stage.<sup>378</sup> Importantly, the Arab-Israeli conflict had a significant impact on the Horn itself. All governments and national liberation movements in the region experienced economic hardship in one form or another following the closure of the Suez Canal which accompanied the conflict.<sup>379</sup>

### III. 2.2 Developments in Soviet Navy's overseas mission from the 1960s

In contrast to the 1960s, in the 1970s, the Soviet navy and military, in general, came to play a more influential role in the Horn. It was justified by the anticipation of the reopening, of the Suez Canal. This provided a real impetus for the Russian Navy to consolidate and to expand its foothold at the southern tip of the Red Sea. The Canal shortened the naval communication lines between the Black Sea and the Northern Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Economically, the Gulf-Red Sea route was a scene of heavy maritime traffic, associated with the transport of raw materials from an area which held two thirds of the world's oil reserves to Europe, which was dependent on Gulf oil for 70

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<sup>376</sup> W. Quandt, 'Soviet Policy in the October Middle East War-I,' *International Affairs* (RIIA) 53, no. 3 (1977): 379-81; Cf. Garin, *Slovo i Delo*, 370.

<sup>377</sup> A. Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 113.

<sup>378</sup> Cf. R. Albioni, *The Red Sea Region* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 31.

<sup>379</sup> Patman, *Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 87.

per cent of its supplies. For that reason, the Soviets were thought to have anticipated that the reopening of the Canal would trigger considerable political change over the next decade in the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia, and the Horn. A naval presence was thus understood to be a useful element in a tactical approach which also included political, economic, subversive, and military aid instruments. The implementation of such an approach would have been a visible reminder that the Kremlin was capable of protecting its own interests and those of its Indian Ocean friends.<sup>380</sup> In this regard, the increase in the number of calls at East African ports between 1968 and 1971, made by Soviet vessels,<sup>381</sup> hints at the importance given to this area by Soviet Navy.

Area	January - February				Total
	1968	1969	1970	1971	
Red Sea (including Aden)	3	18	9	12	42
Persian Gulf	9	14	6	1	30
Indian sub-continent	14	5	7	1	27
<b>E. African coast (Somalia to Mauritius)</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>54</b>
Singapore	0	2	4	3	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>162</b>

**Table 2:** Geographical distribution of Soviet visits to the Indian Ocean<sup>382</sup>

The power vacuum created in the North-eastern part of the Indian Ocean, following the British withdrawal from Aden, further heightened the importance of the area to the Kremlin.<sup>383</sup> In addition, the development of satellite communications technology and the subsequent American decision to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean, reduced the significance of the Kagnew base, which was used to monitor Soviet

<sup>380</sup> Bruce, 'NATO Study on Implications of Reopening Suez Canal,' 12 May 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975NATO02642 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

<sup>381</sup> See table 2.

<sup>382</sup> Source: Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Australian Federal Parliament, Report on the Indian Ocean Region, Appendix 1, cited by Jukes, *The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy*, 17, found in C. Stevens, *The Soviet Union and Black Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 174; Emphasis added.

<sup>383</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Decision on JCS 570/548, a Report by the J-5 on Base Rights in the Indian Ocean Area,' 11 January 1962, NARA 1962, 3930-393, cited in D. Vine, *Island of Shame* (Princeton: PUP, 2009), 71.

activities and gather intelligence in Africa. As a result, Washington focused on developing the communication installation at the Diego García atoll in the Chagos Archipelago.<sup>384</sup> Simultaneously, when London announced its intention to withdraw from Aden, Moscow stepped in and established its first permanent naval presence in the area.<sup>385</sup> According to a former GRU officer, the need to establish bases in the Indian Ocean placed military need higher than the cherished political mantra ‘Down with foreign bases on our territories,’ and the Kremlin obtained docking privileges at Berbera in Somalia and Aden. Similarly, the counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in Aden, Oleg Peresyphkin, considered that the US bases on Diego García and Bahrain, justified Moscow’s ambition to maintain friendly relations with the littoral states.<sup>386</sup>

None of the Soviet’s advances, however, in the Red Sea basin and the Horn, in particular, would have been possible without the development of the Soviet navy in the second half of the 1960s. It was originally accepted that the Soviet navy had no missions on the high seas. Yet, due to Moscow’s awareness of its own weakness during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the Navy’s role was no longer limited only to serving defensive objectives, but became ‘long-range,’<sup>387</sup> and its peacetime mission was aimed at furthering Soviet political objectives.<sup>388</sup> Accordingly, a former Soviet admiral observed that the framework of the new naval doctrine entailed ‘the deployment of units of battle-ready naval forces in remote regions well in advance in order to employ them immediately with the onset of acts of war.’<sup>389</sup> This doctrinal adjustment was realised in the steady build-up

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<sup>384</sup> Bereket Habte Selassie, ‘The American Dilemma on the Horn,’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 22, no. 2, (1984): 260-1.

<sup>385</sup> Cable, State 135878, 11 June 1975, LoC, MD, The Papers of Elliot Richardson, b. 291, f. Indian Ocean.

<sup>386</sup> Vassiliev, *Russian*, 32 and 82-3.

<sup>387</sup> R. Edmonds, *Soviet Foreign Policy 1962-1973* (London: OUP, 1975), 42.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. S. Gorshkov, *Morskaya Moshch Gosudarstva* (Moskva: Voennizdat, 1976).

<sup>389</sup> I. Kapitanets, *Bitva za Mirovoi okean v ‘kholodnoi’ i budushchikh voïnakh* (Moscow: Veche, 2002), 210-1, cited in J. Ferris, *Egypt, the Cold War, and the Civil War in Yemen* (PhD Dissertation: Princeton University, 2008), 202.

of Kremlin's naval presence in the Indian Ocean, in which Somalia played a pivotal role by providing a convenient base at Berbera.

### III. 3. Siad Barre's Coup and the Soviet Union

In late-October 1969, a local, turning point changed the Soviet attitude towards Somalia. A coup, organised by members of the Somali army and police, replaced the civilian government. As the people behind the coup proclaimed themselves to be progressively oriented, Western observers began to look for the Soviet behind-the-scene inspiration. No Bloc account speaks for such involvement, however. In addition, it took the Kremlin some time before it confirmed the progressive character of the new Somali new leaders.

#### III. 3.1 Soviet reactions to Siad's Barre's Coup

The military bloodless coup, led by General Mohamed Siad Barre, which deposed the civilian government of Somalia, came only 24 hours after the burial of the assassinated President Shermarke. The army moved early on 21 October 1969 and seized control of the government, the radio and transport centres. Later, the newly formed Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), composed of the army and police, proclaimed a state of emergency, dissolved the National Assembly, suspended the constitution, and declared all political parties illegal.<sup>390</sup> The SRC also announced over Radio Mogadishu that it would 'respect all treaties and agreements made with friendly countries... maintain a policy of non-alignment, self-determination, and non-interference.'<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> On the first steps taken by the military government see I. Lewis, 'The Politics of the 1969 Somali Coup,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1972).

<sup>391</sup> G. Denney, Jr, 'Somalia: Military Coup,' INR Intelligence Note no. 747, 21 October 1969, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2087, f. POL 21 SOMALI 1/1/67.

Early Soviet press treatment of the Somali coup, however, was evasive and confined to factual reporting. A public lecture in Moscow on 22 October implied that the revolt was not as 'progressive' as those in Libya and the Sudan. On 23 October, *Pravda* reported that the army had already seized full control in the capital and the new regime announced the intention of continuing the foreign policy course and agreements of the previous government. Evidently, in the first 48 hours after the coup, Moscow was uncertain as to the basic orientation of the new Somali rulers. The American observers claimed that the Soviets drew a tentative, preliminary conclusion that the coup was not likely to lead to Somalia's radicalisation.<sup>392</sup> Soon, however, an editorial in *Za Rubezhom* called the coup leaders 'progressive-minded officers' who were discontent with the 'unhealthy' political crisis which had existed since the March 1969 election. The article maintained that Egal's 'flirting' with the US and the FRG had raised 'serious anxiety of progressive intelligentsia and army patriotic circles.' Consequently, the army took charge immediately after Shermarke's assassination in an attempt to pre-empt 'reactionary pro-western elements' claiming power.

According to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, events in Somalia, whose strategic position was considered highly important to Moscow's naval operations in the Indian Ocean, were not meant to affect in a negative way the evolution of Soviet-Somali economic, cultural, and military cooperation.<sup>393</sup> In relation to the composition of the SRC, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Podgorny, and the Soviet Premier, Alexei Kosygin, sent their official congratulations to Major General Mohammed Siad Barre.<sup>394</sup> On 25 October, the Soviet Ambassador visited the new Somali leadership and announced that his Government would continue to maintain and develop

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<sup>392</sup> Cable, Moscow to Secretary of State no. 5897, 23 October 1969, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2087, f. POL 21 SOMALI 1/1/67.

<sup>393</sup> 'Důvodová zpráva,' 13 November 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T, 1964-69, kr. Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/112, 5, s. 1.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

relations with Somalia and its new leadership.<sup>395</sup> In the final analysis, although Moscow's initial response 'offered no systematic evaluation' of the new Somali events, other than gradually coming to recognise army leaders as 'progressive',<sup>396</sup> the Soviet diplomats and their colleagues at the MFA recognised the need to preserve the established relations. In a way, Moscow assumed a wait-and-see position, while it welcomed Mogadishu's potential for 'progressive' political development.

### III. 3.2 Potential Soviet complicity in the Coup

Whatever the initial Soviet response to the October coup, the possible Kremlin role in its preparation remains unclear. The KGB Resident in Mogadishu was informed in advance of the takeover by one of its key organisers, code-named KERL, who had visited Moscow and became a member of the ruling SRC.<sup>397</sup> Additionally, the Kremlin appeared to have welcomed the regime change as relations with Egal's cabinet became strained during the bitter negotiations in the summer of 1969 over the rescheduling of Somalia's debt repayments. Accordingly, following the coup, Soviet navy representatives were the first to visit the newly declared Somali Democratic Republic (SDR). Between 26 November and 12 December, a Kashin-class destroyer, a Kresta cruiser, and an Alligator-class transporter made port calls in both Mogadishu and Berbera. On the other hand, on 2 December, 14 Soviet advisors, headed by the Chief of the African Department of the USSR State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations, Aretemev, arrived in Mogadishu and supposedly offered financial assistance to the new regime.<sup>398</sup> As Gary Payton suggested, the reversal of in the Soviet position gave more weight to the

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<sup>395</sup> 'Záznam,' 17 November 1969, AMZV, f. TO-T, 1964-69, kr. Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/112, 5, s. 1.

<sup>396</sup> Cable, 'Soviet version of causes Somali coup,' Moscow to Secretary of State, no. 6119, 1 November 1969, NACP, RG59, CFPF 1967-69, b. 2087, f. POL 21 SOMALI 1/1/67.

<sup>397</sup> C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 447.

<sup>398</sup> C. Legum and J. Drysdale eds., *Africa Contemporary Record* (New York: Africana Publishing Co, 1969/70), B178-80.

suggestion that the summer crisis of 1969 was ‘manufactured in Moscow.’<sup>399</sup> Therefore, the almost immediate intensification of Soviet-Somali relations, therefore, after the coup explained the speculation within the diplomatic corps which credited Moscow with assisting with the military take-over.

Despite the widely circulated rumours, as Sinitsyn maintained, during the October events a Soviet high-level delegation in Mogadishu was caught by surprise with the sudden change in the political situation. The head of the Soviet delegation was approached by a young Somali officer, who, in good Russian, briefly reported to him that the ‘pro-imperialist regime’ had been overtaken.<sup>400</sup> According to another often told story, the Moscow’s Ambassador, Pasyutin, was awakened in the morning of 21 October 1969 ‘with chagrin at being surprised’ by the revolutionary events of the day.<sup>401</sup> While, the October coup signified a crucial local development, there is no evidence of Soviet involvement behind the military revolt. Besides, it initially received a lukewarm assessment in Moscow. Similar to Soviet operation in Ethiopia, and in accordance with the Kremlin’s cautious approach in the Horn, it took some days before the Moscow’s leadership openly called the new Somali regime ‘progressive.’

### III. 4. Soviet Union and Somalia – deepening relations

At the beginning of the 1970s, Washington became increasingly worried by the increase of the Bloc’s influence in Africa and soon launched efforts, aimed at consolidating the US’ political, economic, and military positions in the continent, and especially, in

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<sup>399</sup> G. Payton, ‘The Somali Coup of 1969: The Case for Soviet Complicity,’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (1980): 506.

<sup>400</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 158.

<sup>401</sup> F. Hadsel, ‘Soviet Influence in Somalia,’ Airgram no. A-128, 8 November 1970, NACP, RG59, SNF 1970-73, b. 2596, f. POL SOMALI-USSR.

strategically important areas.<sup>402</sup> Accordingly, Mogadishu suspected the Western involvement in instigating a counter-revolutionary coup on 27 April 1970, led by the first vice president of the SRC, General Jama Ali Korshel.<sup>403</sup> At the same time, the US sought to provide additional aid to Somalia in order to pre-empt its possible entry into the Eastern Bloc's sphere of influence. Through the chair of the Sub-committee for African Affairs of the Congress, Charles Diggs, who visited the country in February 1972, it was brought to the attention of the Siad's Government that the US could provide Somalia more financial aid. The additional assistance, however, was subject to Mogadishu's embarking on 'reasonable policies' and a refusal to listen to third parties. The Soviets interpreted this as a suggestion that Somalia abandon the close cooperation with the Soviet Bloc. Apparently, Siad rejected the American offer<sup>404</sup> and indicated his commitment to developing relations with the Bloc.

### III. 4. 1. Somalia turns to the Soviet Bloc

Accordingly, in the first year of its rule, the SRC developed strong relations with Berlin. A 22-member East German delegation, led by GDR Foreign Minister Otto Winzer, flew into Mogadishu on 6 April 1970. Somalia agreed to recognise Berlin, and, on 8 April, both states signed an agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level. With this move, Berlin and Mogadishu aimed to 'strengthen the global front, fighting for peace, national independence, and social progress against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism.' They mutually condemned the attempts of 'imperialism,'

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<sup>402</sup> KGB Reference no. 305/D, 'O politike SShA v otnoshenii afrikanskikh stran,' June 1972, AMVR, f. 1, op. 10, a.e. 1812, s. 1, l. 306. See also KGB Reference no. 610, 'O podrŭvnoĭ deyatel'nosti imperialisticheskikh razvedok protiv specialistov iz sotsialisticheskikh gosudarstv nahodyashchikhsya v razvivayushchikhsya stranakh,' 1 July 1970, AMVR, f. 1, op. 10, a.e. 726, s. 1, l. 197.

<sup>403</sup> 'Politický vývoj v Somálsku – IV,' 8 June 1970, NACR, f. KSC – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – Gustáv Husák, k. 1359, i(nvent.) č(islo) 12450 Somálsko, s. 2.

<sup>404</sup> KGB Reference no. 305/D, s. 3, l. 308.

which through ‘increasing aggression, provocation and counter-revolutionary coups aggravated international tension.’ The first ambassador to GDR Werner Herklotz arrived in Mogadishu on 19 May and during the ceremony, at the presentation of his credentials, he confirmed to Siad Berlin’s readiness to provide SRC with a helping hand in its programme to eliminate hunger, disease, and illiteracy.<sup>405</sup> Soon, on 21 May, a second GDR delegation arrived in Mogadishu. The 15-strong group was headed by the deputy Prime-Minister Werner Titel and remained in the country for 11 days. Reportedly, the East German guests discussed with their Somali hosts the possibilities for economic and cultural cooperation,<sup>406</sup> laying the foundations for a substantial aid programme, rumoured to amount, according to British observers, to £20m.<sup>407</sup>

### III. 4.1.1 Moscow’s initial hesitance

Moscow’s conduct in Somalia in the year following the coup demonstrated that the principal Soviet objective in the country appeared to be the cautious expansion of influence with minimal commitment. Initially, the Soviet diplomatic roster was not significantly increased. Although, Ambassador Pasyutin and the members of his staff had not shied away from public displays of their close relations with the SRC, it was apparent that diplomatic influence was secondary to that exerted by the Soviet military specialists. This related to the strategic importance the Moscow’s military leadership came to attribute to Somalia towards the end of 1960s. Accordingly, the American Ambassador, Fred Hadsel, dismissed the notion that the Soviets were embarking on a bold new political offensive in Somalia.

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<sup>405</sup> ‘Politický vývoj v Somálsku – IV,’ 6-8.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>407</sup> S. Whitwell, ‘Somalia: The Slide Downhill, April-June 1970,’ 15 July 1970, TNA, FCO 31/656, fo. 43.

Nevertheless, while Moscow continued to ship small quantities of military material to Mogadishu, no new aid was agreed. The number of Soviet military and technical advisers increased, albeit moderately. Importantly, as the army had taken over the special branch functions of the police, Soviet dominance in military intelligence spread to the field of national security. Consequently, the close association with the Somali army in the 1960s, including training in the Soviet Union for most of the younger officers, provided the Kremlin with a unique position of influence with the SRC. With minimal costs and efforts, therefore, Moscow seemed to have publically committed the Somali Government to 'progressivism' abroad and 'socialism.' Arguably, the Soviet Union's caution in exploiting the new situation in Mogadishu was attributed to a reflection of their unwillingness to make any major new commitments. Apparently, the Kremlin recognised that by pushing 'too fast and hard' it risked provoking a negative reaction by the sensitive Somalis.<sup>408</sup>

While Siad worked on strengthening Mogadishu's 'positive' foreign policy by attempting to develop closer relations with the Bloc, the SRC declared 'Scientific Socialism' as its principle ideology in its domestic affairs. The SRC's adoption of the principles of Scientific Socialism provided an ideological justification for the practical application of a wide array of pragmatic measures, ranging from a reform of the local government through the introduction of the Somali written script to the establishment of State agricultural co-operatives.<sup>409</sup> The growing number of Soviet advisors appreciated these changes in the Somali political economy. An address by the Party organisation of Soviet specialists in Somalia, sent to the 24th Congress of the CPSU, acknowledged the Somali people's choice to embark on a non-capitalist path of development. Moreover, the Soviet advisers stressed that while carrying out the 'honourable task' of the CPSU and

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<sup>408</sup> F. Hadsel, 'Soviet Influence in Somalia,' Airgram no. A-128, 8 November 1970, NACP, RG59, b. 2596, f. POL SOMALI-USSR.

<sup>409</sup> Cf. V. Sofinskii, 'Somali na puti progressa,' *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, no. 10 (1974): 63-4.

the people of the USSR in Somalia, they witnessed the growth of the ‘Soviet Union’s international prestige in maintaining the correct foreign policy course of the Leninist Party.’ Thus, as Somalia chose to develop along a non-capitalist path, Soviet specialists felt ‘deeply conscious of their responsibility for the further development of friendly Soviet-Somali relations and for the provision of comprehensive assistance to the Somali Government and people in their attempt to build a new life.’<sup>410</sup> At the same time, on 8 June 1971, a staff member of the Soviet Embassy in Sofia visited the head of the seventh Department of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry to address the improvement of the Somali-Soviet cooperation that was ‘gradually acquiring a rather universal character.’<sup>411</sup>

### III. 4.1.2 Marshal Grechko’s visit to Somalia

Continuing this line, in February 1972, the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko, paid a visit to Mogadishu. According to some analysts, Grechko’s visit touched off the big Soviet build-up in Somalia.<sup>412</sup> Although, the Soviet officials in Somalia were cautious about discussing the Marshal’s trip,<sup>413</sup> and it did not produce an official communiqué, a brief joint statement confirmed that the future development of Soviet-Somali military cooperation was discussed.<sup>414</sup> Nevertheless, a development in the wider region of North-East Africa in 1972 provided an additional stimulus for the subsequent deepening of Moscow’s involvement in Mogadishu. The real breakthrough in Soviet-Somali relations came shortly after the Soviets’ expulsion from Egypt in July 1972. Importantly, in May

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<sup>410</sup> ‘Pismo chlenov sovetskikh kolektivov, rabotayushchikh v Somaliiskoi Demokraticeskoj Respublike (g. Mogadisho),’ 31 March 1971, RGANI, f. 1, op. 6, d. 87, l. 130.

<sup>411</sup> Memcon, USSR Embassy in Sofia, 8 June 1971, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 27, d. 180, pr. 3754, s. 1, l. 1.

<sup>412</sup> B. Crozier, ‘Russia’s bounty has given her the edge in Somalia,’ *The Times*, 3 March 1975, 14.

<sup>413</sup> Beam, ‘Conversation with Soviet MFA Officials Re Somalia and Ethiopia,’ Airgram no. A-1351, 17 December 1971, NACP, RG59, SNF 1970-73, Political and Defence, b. 2596, From POL SOMALI-USSR to POL 7 SP, f. POL SOMALI-USSR.

<sup>414</sup> Intelligence Memorandum, ‘Soviet-Somali Relations,’ 26 January 1973, NACP, RG263, Tranche Twenty Two, b. 2, #17268 - # 28641.

1972, Siad travelled to Beijing where he made an unsuccessful request for military assistance. Siad's initiative may have made the Soviets nervous, and may have encouraged them to be more accommodating when Mogadishu despatched its Defence Minister, Mohamed Ali Samatar, to Moscow in July.

According to US intelligence, it was quite possible that Samatar's trip was the turning point in Soviet-Somali relations. The Mogadishu official had the chance to be in Moscow at the exactly time that Sadat's expulsion order was announced. Samatar was, therefore, able to exploit the Russian position, in which they were unwilling to face more troubles from their clients.<sup>415</sup> At the same time, the Soviets also appeared to be pleased with Siad's 29 July speech at the Halane Orientation Centre, in which, for the first time, he defined Somali socialism as Marxist-Leninist. Similarly, the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Mogadishu, Lev Mironov, approved Siad's efforts to educate the masses politically, as well as to create mass organisations, which could later form the basis for 'a genuine Marxist-Leninist party.'<sup>416</sup> In order to strengthen his argument, the Soviet diplomat contrasted Somalia to other African countries that had already proclaimed themselves as 'socialist' but, in fact, had failed to build socialism. The Soviet Union, therefore, as the 'first Socialist country,' was determined to assist Somalia in training cadres, 'when asked.' Later, in September, Mironov, reportedly 'radiated confidence and optimism' about the future of Soviet-Somali ties, and characterised the regime as 'stable' by virtue of the fact that it could extend its authority to all areas, especially the economy.<sup>417</sup>

The quick succession of events in the 1972, starting with Marshal Grechko's visit and the subsequent expulsion of Soviet military personnel from Egypt led to a marked

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<sup>415</sup> 'Soviet-Somali Relations,' NACP.

<sup>416</sup> Cromwell, 'Soviet Assessment of Somalia and Somali-Soviet Relations,' Airgram no. A-111, 17 September 1972, NACP, RG59, SNF 1970-73, b. 2596, f. POL SOMALI-USSR.

<sup>417</sup> Cromwell, 'Soviet Assessment of Somalia and Somali-Soviet Relations.'

increase of Soviet presence in Somalia. It was followed by the delivery of weapons, equipment, and other military material.<sup>418</sup> All this hinted at the military's influence in the Kremlin's activist role in Somalia. Seemingly, the loss of a foothold in Northeast Africa after the expulsion of Russian advisers from Egypt gave the Soviet military a *carte blanche* for scrambling into Somalia in an attempt to maintain a presence in a strategically vital region in both the geopolitical and military sense.

### III. 4.1.3 Growing Soviet military and security involvement

From mid-1972 the Soviet presence in Somalia became more obvious, than it had been immediately following the coup. Military circles in Moscow and Mogadishu were the prime movers in insisting on further development of ties between the two countries. Moscow's military specialists looked at Somalia as a strategically valuable part of the world where the Soviet navy could have its bases. Similarly, the Somali military were well disposed towards the Soviet Union,<sup>419</sup> as Moscow was Mogadishu's primary provider of equipment and training. The Soviet Union also trained hundreds of Somali army officers in Soviet military academies. Last, but not least, led by a Major General, Soviet military specialists in Somalia advised the Somali armed forces.<sup>420</sup> The Somali air forces were reportedly equipped with MIG 15s, 17s and 21s, Ilyushin 28s, Antonov 24s, and 8 helicopters.<sup>421</sup> Consequently, thanks to the intensification of Soviet military supplies, by 1974 the size of the Somali army had increased to 17,000 soldiers and

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<sup>418</sup> J. Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska i politička kretanja u zemlji,' no. 213/75, 12 June 1975, DAMSP-RS, f. PA - Mala zemalja [...Somalija...] 1975, fasc. 223, dos. 6, sig. 435693, s. 14.

<sup>419</sup> T. Ribarov [Report on the development of the Ethiopian-Somali Relations], 10 December 1973, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 30, d. 59, pr. 1173, s. 17, l. 48.

<sup>420</sup> 'Současna úroveň vztahů Somálské demokratické republiky se Sovětským svazem,' 3 July 1973, AMZV, f. TO-T, kr. 1970-74, Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/111, 1, s. 3.

<sup>421</sup> It was also alleged that about 30 pilots received their training in the Soviet Union. In the field of air defence, SAM-2 and SAM-3 sites had allegedly been built, and SAM-7s had also been supplied to the air force. Additionally, the Somali army had received 200 T34 and 40 T54 tanks, and its Navy had reportedly obtained two missile launching craft and five P6 fast torpedo boats. See Bruce, 'NATO Study on Implications of Reopening Suez Canal.'

officers as opposed to only 4,000 back in 1964.<sup>422</sup> In return for their military assistance, Moscow established a naval communications station at Berbera, and improved the harbour of Birikao, near the Kenyan border. Moreover, by 1974, Moscow managed to deploy, approximately 3,600 Soviet advisers in Somalia, 1,600 of whom were military personnel. Eventually, by 1976, the Soviet programme of military assistance turned the Somali military into one of the most heavily equipped armies in Sub-Saharan Africa, only surpassed by those of the far-greater states of Nigeria, Zaire, and Ethiopia.<sup>423</sup>

Still, equally significant to the military aid and expertise extended by the Soviet was the assistance Moscow provided to the Somali security apparatus, which formed one of the two main pillars of Siad Barre's Scientific Socialism, the other being the vast network of mass organisations.<sup>424</sup> Consistent with the universal character of the Soviet-Somali ties, it was suspected that the Kremlin took responsibility for overseeing the creation and the expansion of the Somali National Security Service. Yuri Andropov, the KGB chief, paid a secret ten-day visit to Mogadishu in 1972.<sup>425</sup> Consequently, with the KGB's assistance in the 1970s, the NSS succeeded in setting up a network of informers throughout the Somali Democratic Republic.<sup>426</sup> Naturally, following the Soviet experience, the inception of the NSS led to the creation of a number of other coercive organisations, including Regional Security Committees and the Guulwadayaal militia, also known as the 'victory pioneers',<sup>427</sup> based on the Soviet auxiliary police organisation - the Druzhinniki.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska I politička kretanja u zemlji,' ss. 14-5.

<sup>423</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II*, 449.

<sup>424</sup> Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship*, 127.

<sup>425</sup> Cromwell, 'Soviet Assessment of Somalia and Somali-Soviet Relations,' Airgram no. A-111, 17 September 1972, NACP, RG59, SNF 1970-73, b. 2596, f. POL SOMALI-USSR. See also Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska I politička kretanja u zemlji,' s. 15. On rumoured visit of Andropov, see also S. Hamrick, 'BBC Broadcast on Soviet Influence In Somalia,' 6 March 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI00338 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>426</sup> Crozier, 'Russia's bounty,' 14.

<sup>427</sup> Ghalib, *Op. cit.*, 127.

<sup>428</sup> Crozier, *Op. cit.*, 14.

In further strengthening Siad's grasp of the country, particular attention was given to ideological training, as well. Undoubtedly, a crucial role in it was given to all Somalis, who had earned their degrees of higher education at Soviet universities. Hundreds more were required to attend ideological courses in Somalia in specially created political orientation centres, operated by Soviet advisers.<sup>429</sup> In addition, the presence of a dozen KGB men at the NSS headquarters was far more than symbolic. Ultimately, the KGB's entrenchment in the Somali security field led to rumours of Soviet agents' feeding disinformation to the NSS designed to exacerbate Somali distrust of the United States. Allegedly, the KGB Residency in Mogadishu concocted reports that the CIA was collecting intelligence on the Somali army which it then passed on to Ethiopia.<sup>430</sup> Similarly, the American Ambassador, Horace Torbert, suspected another Soviet-planted disinformation programme, targeting the US presence in Somalia. In a letter to relatives back in America, a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia stated that he had planned to attack Somali troops. The Americans managed to prove that the letter was fabricated. Despite this, Mogadishu remained highly suspicious of Washington's designs.<sup>431</sup> With the advent of military rule, the Americans became the 'odd men out' of all the Western embassies assigned to the country. To US diplomats, Mogadishu began to appear the worst post in East Africa and every room in the American Embassy residence was 'bugged,' and attempts to have the embassy itself bugged, 'went on 24 hours a day.'<sup>432</sup>

Justification of the need for Soviet engagement in active measures against the Americans in Somalia, could be found in earlier speculations about Washington's intelligence operations in that country. TASS's correspondent previously reported to Moscow that the Iraqi weekly newspaper *Itihad Al Shaab* devoted a series of articles on

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<sup>429</sup> Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska I politička kretanja u zemlji,' 16.

<sup>430</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II*, 449.

<sup>431</sup> Interview with H. Torbert, 31 August 1988, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>432</sup> Interview with J. Loughran, 22 June 1988, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

American covert activity in Somalia. According to the paper, the ‘American spy network’ in Somalia, back in the mid-1960s, managed to infiltrate all ministries, including the army and the police force. The main source of information for the CIA was an American General, who advised the state police, and was linked to the US Embassy. Besides, Langley was also suspected of monitoring the activities of the embassies of the Socialist and Third World countries. Of particular sensitivity to the Somalis, however, gathered intelligence was also referred to the Ethiopian authorities, through the assistant chief of the US Information Service in Somalia, who had previously worked in Ethiopia.<sup>433</sup> These claims, nevertheless, found their tacit confirmation by Ambassador Torbert who headed the US diplomatic mission in 1963-65. According to him, there was a ‘couple of CIA men’ attached to the Embassy, playing their respective roles about which ‘he believed he had prior knowledge.’ In explaining the nature of the CIA’s activities, Torbert asserted that they were in support of the existing government and the agents spent some money on ‘things which [they] thought were quite justified in developing a democratic election structure.’ The Americans, in Torbert’s assessment, were certainly the ‘Big Brother’ in many ways.<sup>434</sup>

The KGB was also well aware of the CIA’s activities in Somalia. As cover, besides the US Embassy, CIA agents used other American organisations, such as the USAID, for example. A US aid worker was revealed by a Soviet security detail to be an American intelligence operative under, code named, ‘K.’ During a reception at the US Embassy, ‘K.’ tried to establish contact with Soviet representatives, who were exceedingly cautious and shunned the agent’s advances.<sup>435</sup> Thus, the increase of Soviet military and security presence in Somalia aimed both to check the American influence

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<sup>433</sup> TASS, 5 December 1965, ‘Itihad Al Shaab o deyatel’nosti TsRU,’ GARF, f. 4459, o. 43, d. 4753, l. 83.

<sup>434</sup> Interview with H. Torbert, ADST Online.

<sup>435</sup> KGB Reference no. 241, ‘O deyatel’nosti amerikanskikh spetssluzhnb protiv uchrezhdenii i grazhdan sotsialisticheskikh stran, nakhodyashchikhsya v Afrike,’ c. 1970, AMVR, f. 1, op. 10, a.e. 724, s. 7, l. 205.

and help advance Moscow's internationalist agenda of stimulating countries on the non-capitalist path of development. The Kremlin's attempts to achieve this double-sided objective, however, clashed with the stubborn and suspicious Somali character. This eventually led to Moscow's position of influence in the country being limited.

### III. 5. Soviet-Somali Problems

The Soviet Union attached particular importance to cooperation with Somalia, which was emphasised by the political and strategic utility of the Horn. Ideologically, this was rooted in the Kremlin's persistent implementation of the Leninist principles of Soviet foreign policy, i.e. the provision of versatile support to regimes that had become part of a united anti-imperialist front.<sup>436</sup> On the other hand, the difficulties Moscow faced while pursuing its foreign policy objectives in Somalia, were caused by the manner in which the Soviet Union and its allies read the political processes within the Third World. As a KGB report maintained, according to a US analysis, the socialist countries were only able to strengthen their positions in some African states temporarily by providing economic and military aid, as well as politically supporting their national liberation movements. Moreover, the Bloc's ability to spread its influence in Africa was limited as, unlike the West, it lacked long-standing experience on in the continent. As a result, the Socialist states failed to allow for the specificity and the needs of the independent African countries, as well as to note the differences in the psychology of their respective political leaders.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> 'Současná úroveň vztahů Somálské demokratické republiky se Sovětským svazem,' 3 July 1973, AMZV, f. TO-T, 1970-74, kr. Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/111, ss. 1; 5.

<sup>437</sup> KGB Reference, 'O deyatel'nosti SShA v Afrike,' c. 1973, AMVR, f. 1, op. 10, no. 1970, s. 4, l. 32.

### III. 5.1 The limit of Soviet influence

Despite the difficulties Moscow encountered in Mogadishu, it seemed that the Russians tried to be patient, while acknowledging some of the peculiarities of the local political landscape. From the outset, the Somali government's cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus notably complicated the relations between the two countries by creating obstacles to Moscow's activities. Most of Soviet criticism in this regard was directed at the staff of the Ministry of the Information which failed to publish all TASS materials sent to them. In addition, every year, the departure of Somali scholars to the USSR caused serious problems, as well. The selection of candidates was carried out at the last minute, and it often did not match Moscow's requirements. Yet, in evaluating the bureaucratic issues, the Russians concluded that these were not by design, but rather were due to individual actions of members of the state institutions. Moscow showed patience, however, and deliberately did not take retaliatory actions that might have violated the agreed terms of cooperation in various fields.<sup>438</sup>

Similarly, while circumstantial 'evidence' makes a compelling case for assuming a possible Soviet entrenchment in the Somali security field, it is rather far-fetched to assume that the Somalis were blatantly manipulated by the KGB or any other overt Soviet advisers. It is equally wrong to assert that the Soviets obtained any position of influence within the Somali government without receiving at least informal sanction by the respective authorities.<sup>439</sup> Siad's approach to the suspects in the May 1971 plot against him offers a clue in this direction. The Vice-President Ainanshe and General Salaad Gabeyre Kediye,

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<sup>438</sup> 'Současná úroveň vztahů Somálské demokratické republiky se Sovětským svazem,' 3 July 1973, AMZV, f. TO-T, 1970-74, kr. Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/111, 1, ss. 3-4.

<sup>439</sup> In the same way, the former First Chief Directorate deputy director Vadim Kirpichenko claimed that all accounts on active Soviet inference in African domestic affairs are completely unfounded. The Kremlin, he added, provided advice, military and security assistance only on the initiative of the locals. See Kirpichenko, *Iz arkhiva razvedchika* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnĕ Otnosheniya, 1993), 87.

who was one of the leaders of the 1969 revolt and, ironically, a suspected KGB agent,<sup>440</sup> were executed for their assumed complicity in the ‘counter-revolutionary’ abortive coup on 3 July 1972<sup>441</sup>. A number of other high-level officials who dared to disapprove of the regime’s tactics had to undergo ‘orientation courses’ in Moscow. It seems plausible that the Soviets were kept at arm’s length. Siad realised that the intricate network of clan patronage through which he had to manoeuvre in order to keep his grasp on power, simply could not support large-scale social reform<sup>442</sup> under direct Soviet tutelage. Therefore, the pragmatic nature of many of the Somali’s initiatives suggested that Russians’ influence over the policy-making process of the SRC was far from complete.<sup>443</sup> This yet again demonstrated how difficult it was for Moscow to marry the Soviet theoretical concepts of socialist development with the actual situation on the ground.<sup>444</sup>

Siad’s inability to persuade the country’s periphery of the virtues of his Scientific Socialism further exemplifies the dialectic discrepancies between theory and practice and deepened the suspicion the Somalis harboured towards Moscow. In January-February 1974, Siad toured Somalia’s north and later in April he left Mogadishu for a two-week trip to the south. Siad’s tours in the countryside showed his desire to get the local authorities involved in the process of development. The aim was to engage the representatives at village level in political offices, reporting directly to Siad himself. Back in the summer of 1973, it appeared that these offices could form the nucleus of an East European-style political party. By the autumn of 1974, however, it became clear that the regime had steered away from this plan. The reason behind it was the Somali people’s deep disgust at earlier experience with political parties. In addition, in the American

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<sup>440</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II*, 449.

<sup>441</sup> I. Lewis, ‘The Politics of the 1969 Somali Coup,’ 405, n. 1.

<sup>442</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 273.

<sup>443</sup> J. Shaw, ‘Somali Democratic Republic: Annual Review for 1973,’ 1 January 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1743, fo. 1.

<sup>444</sup> For a similar, albeit broader, analysis on incompatibility of African realities and Soviet expectations, see Kirpichenko, *Iz arkhiva razvedchika*, 85.

diplomats' opinion, the Somalis probably feared that the Party could be a channel for Soviet and other foreign influence.<sup>445</sup>

Additionally, the Soviet's observers in the country gauged Siad's inability to gather popular support. The KGB, for example, supplied the Centre with a harsh analysis of the complicated political trends in the country. Siad's Scientific Socialism appeared to be unsupported by concrete measures, and the Somali leadership did not appear to have realistic plans for overcoming the country's economic problems and dependence on external powers. Furthermore, according to the KGB Residence, the country lacked any democratically representative institutions. Additionally, the Somali President extended his control over the country by relying primarily on the army, police, and the security services, whose composition was selected from a number of loyal people. The position of the progressive forces in the army and the state apparatus were undermined by Siad's policies of cleansing and displacing, aimed at pre-emptively crushing any potential opposition movements, especially in the army. At the same time, there was a marked increase in the activities of the right-wing nationalist and pro-Western elements in the SRC and the government, the commanding of the army, police, and the NSS. The right-wing nationalists actively supported reactionary forces in Somalia's Northern provinces. Private traders tended to hold on to loads of essential goods in order to provoke public discontent with Siad's leadership.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> J. Cromwell, 'Somali Domestic Scene,' 8 August 1973, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1973MOGADI01153 [accessed on 13 December 2008]; See also R. Kirk, 'Siad Regime's Internal Power Position,' 9 April 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974MOGADI00497 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>446</sup> KGB Reference no. 491/D, 'O vnutrennej i vneshnej politike Somali,' August 1972, AMVR, f.1, op. 10, a.e. 1815, s. 1ff, l. 146ff.

### III. 5.2 Complications in the Somali domestic setting

In Somalia, the Russians encountered a number of constraints to their presence in the country. Many local peculiarities, such as Somalis' general suspicion of foreigners, heavy bureaucracy, and Mogadishu's expansionist ambitions worried the Kremlin. Towards the mid-1970s, Moscow became well aware that it had turned out to be quite unpopular with the Somali government and population. Nevertheless, the Kremlin continued their advances with extra care. The Russians aimed to restrain the Somali destabilising expansionism, while maintaining their regional objectives by launching various infrastructural projects.

On 1 September 1974, it became public that the National Security Court (NSC) in the northern Somali town of Hargeisa sentenced a man to death and five others to life imprisonment for organising and taking part in 'a secret underground anti-revolutionary association,' aimed at destabilising the country. Two days after the Hargeisa convictions, twelve more people were sent to prison after being found convicted of launching malicious propaganda against the state, condemning socialism. None of these plots posed any serious direct threat to the central government, but they indicated a sense of discontent within the country, manifested in outspoken criticism of the regime.<sup>447</sup>

The assassination of ten sheikhs on 23 January 1975 further distressed the regime. It followed Siad's speech on 11 January, which commemorated International Women's Year. Siad proclaimed the Government's decision to support equal rights for women and provide for parity in matters of inheritance, which superseded the traditional system sanctioned by Koranic law. The sheikhs, who challenged the Government's decision, were executed. According to opposition voices in Somalia, the executions characterised

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<sup>447</sup> A. Gundersen, 'Discontent within Somalia,' 6 August 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1744, fo. 3. This letter was received at the EAD on 17 September, probably it was written on 1 September, as it discusses events that took place namely on this date.

‘the brutality and perfidy of the Marxist junta in Somalia which aimed at breaking the will of the Somali people to resist the Marxist ideology.’ Similarly, those, particularly among the Arabs, ascribed Siad’s actions to Soviet pressure and advice.<sup>448</sup> In turn, Siad declared that if Saudi Arabia launched an anti-Somali campaign, Mogadishu would be forced to disclose documents, implicating the convicted sheikhs in obtaining clandestine support from the Saudi government in exchange for spreading anti-socialist and anti-Soviet propaganda in Somalia.<sup>449</sup>

Siad’s domestic standing was further complicated on 18 March 1975 when some of the most prominent Marxist ideologues among the civilian SRC advisers, such as Mohamed Aden Sheikh, Mohamed Weyrah, and Abdulaziz Nur Hersi were detained. The most likely explanation for their arrest was that they had been involved in indiscreet criticisms on the slow progress in establishing a political vanguard party.<sup>450</sup> Interpretations vary as to what had happened behind the scenes in March. It seemed possible that infighting was taking place within the government, but the line-up of the different factions and their stance vis-à-vis the Soviets was far from clear.<sup>451</sup> According to information from the Bulgarian Chargé, Siad detained Aden, Weirah, and Hersi, accusing them of pro-left inclinations and counter-revolutionary activities and then sent them to prison in an attempt to assert his authority and regain the Arab countries’ confidence after the January executions.<sup>452</sup>

In addition, the Egyptian Military Attaché, Nasr el-Din, believed that Siad’s internal problems were inspired by the Soviets, who were trying to hint that his growing

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<sup>448</sup> See J. Shaw, ‘The Revolutionary Government and Islam,’ 28 January 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1925, fo. 4 and O. Ahmed ‘A Statement by the Somali Refugee Relief Committee,’ 4 February 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1925, fo. 3.

<sup>449</sup> L. Krastev, ‘Informatsiya odnosno reshenieto na VRS za davane ravnopravie na zhenite i mazhete v DR Somaliya,’ 31 January 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 32, d. 190, pr. 4198, ss. 2-3, ll. 25-6.

<sup>450</sup> J. Shaw, ‘Internal Situation,’ 8 April 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1925, fo. 8.

<sup>451</sup> Letter, MacKechnie to Gundersen, 15 April 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1925, fo. 7.

<sup>452</sup> L. Krastev, ‘Polozhenieto v Somaliya prez pŭrvoto trimesechie na 1975 godina,’ 12 April 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 26p, d. 20, pr. 235, s. 8, l. 19.

independence from Moscow was a perilous path to take. The Cairo diplomat also reckoned that, eventually, the Somali leader understood Moscow's message and pulled back, firmly re-establishing himself in the Soviet orbit. On 11 April, the celebrations of the 15th anniversary of the Somali National Army showed that the personal conflict between Siad and Samatar had been put behind them. Importantly, the third most noticeable official on display then was the Soviet Ambassador, who played the role of 'ringmaster' sitting between them.<sup>453</sup>

Speculation about the Kremlin's deepening involvement in Somalia inhibited Moscow's local actions. By getting involved, more often than they would have desired, in the vortex of Somali political and social cleavages, the Soviet advisers found themselves under attack by the so-called 'reactionary' forces and incidents against them became frequent. This forced the Soviet ambassador to prohibit the movement of Soviet citizens around Mogadishu alone at night. Steadily, the crisis led to discontent amongst large segments of the population against Siad's attempt at building Scientific Socialism. Moreover, Somali 'reactionary circles' discredited the objective difficulties the Somali Government encountered as subjective shortcomings, inherent to socialism.<sup>454</sup> To make matters worse, on 5 March 1975, a BBC Somali language broadcast<sup>455</sup> claimed that fifteen Soviet KGB officers served as advisors to Siad and the NSS was no longer under the direction of Colonel Suleiman, but was absorbed by the KGB and General Samatar, who were closely associated with the Kremlin. The broadcast also alleged that the Soviet contingent in Somalia totalled 4,000 people, half of which was military advisors,

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<sup>453</sup> S. Hamrick, 'Siad, the Soviets, and Their Common Internal Problems in Somalia,' 30 April 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI00633 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>454</sup> Krastev, 'Polozhenieto v Somaliya,' 5.

<sup>455</sup> The broadcast was based on publication by Institute for the Study of Conflict entitled 'The Soviet presence in Somalia,' by Brian Crozier; see Richardson 'Soviet Influence in Somalia,' 10 March 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975LONDON03616 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

featuring a large KGB component.<sup>456</sup> In effect, the BBC broadcast struck a painful nerve in Somalia where the Muslim masses 'heartily despised' the Soviets and their system.<sup>457</sup>

### III. 5.3 Somali territorial ambitions

The Soviets also encountered problems with Somali territorial ambitions. According to Egypt's military attaché, the Russians had irritated Siad by insisting on installing a complex defence system along the Somali coast. Importantly, the system also envisaged the integration of selected shore facilities with the joint Somali/Soviet fishing fleet. Although, the fleet was to be outfitted with radio and electronic equipment far exceeding fishing needs,<sup>458</sup> the Soviets showed no intention of supporting Somalia's territorial ambitions.

On the contrary, in continuation of its established stance of non-tolerance of open local hostility, Moscow wished to restrain Somalia from launching hostile actions against Ethiopia. An important step in this regard was the conclusion, in July 1974, of a Friendship treaty during Podgorny's visit to Mogadishu. Initially, following Marshal Grechko's visit, when Moscow began pressing Mogadishu for the conclusion of the Treaty, Siad felt he should resist Soviet advances as he expected troubles with the reactionary Arab states. Then, he courted the League member-states which, in January, allegedly promised economic support to Mogadishu. Following the admission to the League, Siad's reluctance to sign the treaty with the Russians diminished and he finally succumbed to Moscow's pressure.<sup>459</sup> Although the Treaty was described by Moscow as a pact 'between equals,'<sup>460</sup> contrary to Mogadishu's interpretation, it did not offer any

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<sup>456</sup> S. Hamrick, 'BBC Broadcast on Soviet Influence in Somalia.'

<sup>457</sup> See S. Hamrick, 'Somalia's Feud with BBC Regarding Soviet Influence,' 17 March 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI00391 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>458</sup> S. Hamrick, 'Egyptian Views On Soviet Military Activity In Somalia,' 28 April 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI00621 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>459</sup> Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska,' 14.

<sup>460</sup> Brian Crozier, 'Russia's,' 14.

support for Mogadishu's expansionist aspirations. Reminiscent of their restraining stance in the 1960s, the Soviets remained interested in decreasing the tension in the region.<sup>461</sup> The treaty was, therefore, not a pact of mutual military alliance, such as those concluded with 'fraternal socialist countries,' where the parties committed each other to direct military support in case of aggression from a third party.<sup>462</sup>

Evidently, the Kremlin was well informed of the continuous character of Mogadishu's regional policy. For some time, the KGB had intelligence that Somalia was engaging in the creation in the Ogaden of clandestine organisations, aiming to gather support of the local population against the Ethiopians 'in the event of a crisis.' The Somali army leaders' confidence in their military and technological superiority over their neighbours made the idea of creating Greater Somalia through the use of force, extremely popular within the ranks of Somali military. The Soviets, however, reckoned that Siad sought to expand co-operation with the Bloc in a bid to attract support for his expansionism.<sup>463</sup> In line with the Kremlin's rather tentative treatment of this issue, the joint communiqué distributed during Podgorny's visit lacked even an indirect statement of Soviet support for Somalia's irredentist claims. In order to make Mogadishu's ambitions vis-à-vis Ethiopia even more fraught, the Soviets, who supplied Somalia with oil from the Persian Gulf, apparently kept prices at world market level.<sup>464</sup>

As a result, Somali discontent with Soviet policy in the country culminated in SRC's suggestion to Siad to follow Egypt's experience in ejecting the Russians. The Somali President was reported to have taken a defensive stance by saying: 'I am ready to do that if I am offered a reasonable plan on how we can make this without deterioration

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<sup>461</sup> T. Ribarov, Report on the development of the Ethiopian-Somali Relations.

<sup>462</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 199.

<sup>463</sup> KGB Reference no. 523/D, 'Ob otnosheniyakh mezhdu Éfiopieĭ i Somali,' August 1972, AMVR, f.1, op. 10, a.e. 1815, s. 3, l. 212.

<sup>464</sup> R. Kirk, 'Podgorny Visit: Economic Assistance,' 20 July 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974MOGADI01150 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

in the army.’ As the Soviet Ambassador was made aware of this,<sup>465</sup> this suggests that the Russians were well informed of the negative attitude against them, harboured by the Somali government.

### III. 5.4 The salience of geo-strategy: The Berbera affair

Moscow’s experience in Somalia showed that the political and economic realities of the Indian Ocean littoral state significantly complicated the expansion of Soviet influence.<sup>466</sup> One of the episodes which best characterises Soviet-Somali relations took place in mid-1975 when Siad Barre invited American congressional representatives and journalists to inspect the alleged Soviet base built at Berbera. However, there is no consensus regarding Siad’s intentions. What really stands out is that by the Berbera affair he demonstrated both the complicated nature of Soviet involvement in the region and the Somalis ability to capture international attention to their advantage.

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<sup>465</sup> Krastev, ‘Polozhenieto v Somaliya,’ 8-9.

<sup>466</sup> H. Desfosses, ‘Naval Strategy and Aid Policy,’ in *Chinese and Soviet Aid to Africa*, ed. W. Weinstein (New York: Praeger, 1975), 183.



**Map 4:** Strategic locations on the Horn of Africa<sup>467</sup>

As early as 1962, Moscow agreed to assist Mogadishu in constructing port facilities in Berbera, a small harbour overlooking the Red Sea choke point. The installation was completed in 1969, and by 1971, 16 Soviet ships had made calls at the port. In 1972, Marshal Grechko visited Somalia for the alleged signing of a Soviet-Somali military agreement. This was soon followed by an increase in Soviet use of facilities at Berbera, including the establishment of a naval communications site and the arrival of a repair ship, which remained permanently docked from 1973 onwards. Then, importantly, the Soviets began construction of what had subsequently been identified by American overhead reconnaissance as missile storage and handling facility, capable of

<sup>467</sup> Picture source: *Google Earth*.

supporting the Kremlin's naval and air activities in the northwest Indian Ocean.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, the Soviets also showed interest in developing naval facilities in Aden, thus, insuring against a sudden change in their relations with either country. This effort almost certainly reflected Somalia's importance to the Kremlin's interests in protecting Soviet sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean.<sup>469</sup>

The West was clearly worried about the Soviet naval build-up. Accordingly, Soviet policy in the Indian Ocean area was 'assertive in the attempt to demonstrate the position of the Soviet Union as the superpower and to derive the political advantages.'<sup>470</sup> Much of the story - such as the purpose and the nature of the installations at Berbera - was concocted by intelligence sources. However, there has been considerable debate, about the nature of the Berbera facilities. The known facts are that the Soviet naval fleet enjoyed a harbour without a deep port and with few natural resources.<sup>471</sup>

While the Russians had been granted exclusive access to Berbera, its importance was almost certainly overstated by the US military who sought to convince a disinclined Congress to support the development of an Anglo-American installation on Diego García.<sup>472</sup> As effective military balance was vital for the preservation of international stability, on 12 May 1975, before the Congress, the US President described the expansion of the Diego Garcia base as essential to American national interests.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Cable, State 135878, 11 June 1975, L[ibrary] o[f] C[ongress], M[anuscript] D[ivision], The Papers of Elliot Richardson, b. 291, Ambassadorial File, Great Britain, f. Indian Ocean.

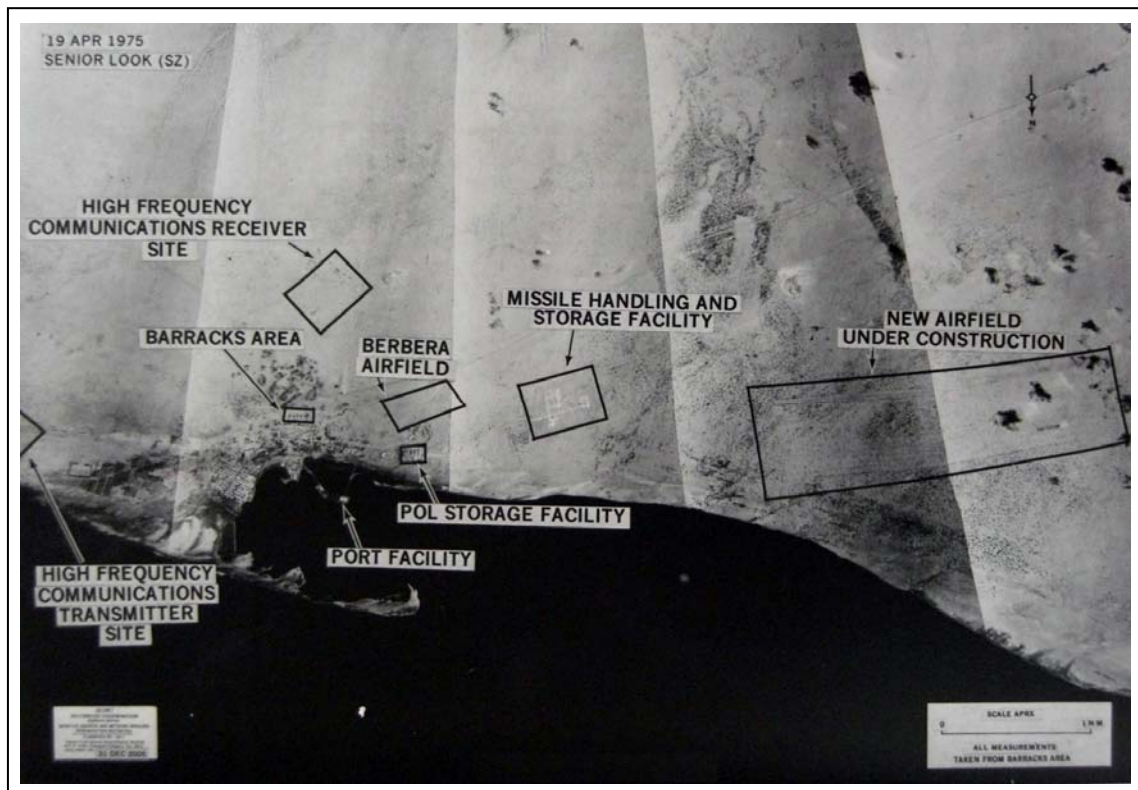
<sup>469</sup> Horn of Africa, Study Pursuant to NSSM 184, 6 July 1973, NACP, Nixon Presidential Material Staff, b. H-068, National Security Council Institutional ('H') Files Meeting Files (1969-74), f. SRG Meeting - NSSM 184 Horn of Africa 7/25/73.

<sup>470</sup> Information Research Department, *The Soviet Presence in the Indian Ocean* (1974), cited in J. Bloch and P. Fitzgerald, *British Intelligence and Covert Action* (Dublin: Mount Salus Press, 1982), 93.

<sup>471</sup> See map 5.

<sup>472</sup> C. Legum and B. Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1977), 12. The pro-left *Leveller*, on the other hand commented that Western intelligence 'was part of an orchestrated western campaign - around the same time [...]. By the time the campaign had run its course, it would have [...] a great deal of courage and an encyclopaedia of facts, to dispel the carefully created illusion that Somalia was a Soviet puppet.' See *Leveller* no. 13 (March 1978), cited in Bloch and Fitzgerald, *British Intelligence*, 94.

<sup>473</sup> Cable, State 135878, 11 June 1975, LoC, MD, The Papers of Elliot Richardson, b. 291, f. Indian Ocean.



**Map 5:** Orientation view of Berbera<sup>474</sup>

Due to the international community's heightened interest in the area, as a result of reopening of the Suez Canal on 5 June 1975, the Berbera story received worldwide attention. As early as February 1975, a Dutch intelligence report, substantiated by US sources, claimed that the Russians were steadily working on facilities, already occupied by the Soviet navy at Berbera.<sup>475</sup> Later, on 10 and 11 July 1975 US Senator Dewey Bartlett gave individual briefings on his recent inspection of the site, following Siad's invitation. The Senator acknowledged that the installations did not constitute a missile base, but a handling, refuelling, and storage facility for Soviet surface-to-surface missiles. He concluded then that the Soviet presence at the Somali port, justified the projected expenditure of US\$15m to expand the US air and naval base on Diego García.

<sup>474</sup> Photo source US Defence Intelligence Agency, 19 April 1975, G[erald] R. F[ord] L[ibrary], NSA, CFA 1974-77, b. 5, f. Somalia (2).

<sup>475</sup> H. Kissinger, 'Soviet Military Activities in Somalia,' 19 February 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975STATE037154 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

At the same time, the Soviet press gave a good deal of publicity to the issue, vigorously denying the existence of Soviet military bases in Somalia. On 18 June 1975, *Krasnaya Zvezda* qualified the rumours of the presence of a Soviet military base in Somalia as a Pentagon ‘disinformation’ campaign aimed at diverting the world’s attention from the ‘dangerous’ American plans to expand Washington’s military operation in the Indian Ocean via Diego García.<sup>476</sup> Accordingly, in March 1975, the Somali Defence Minister, Samatar argued that Somalia was a key to domination in the Indian Ocean, Arab Gulf, and Red Sea and, therefore, was a threat to Imperialist strategy in the region.<sup>477</sup>

Nevertheless, in Siad’s defence, the American diplomats in Mogadishu speculated that the Somali President might not have been fully aware of the real purpose of the Berbera missile handling facility. This interpretation was partially confirmed by Siad’s interview in July’s *Afriqueasie*. Reportedly, Siad’s invitation to US inspectors tried to re-establish US-Somali dialogue. He had sent a letter to President Ford, reiterating his assurances about the nature of the Soviet presence in Somalia. Moreover, he claimed to have invited members of the US Congress to show them the base, which the Soviets had allegedly built without his knowledge. This was the first time Siad implied that he and the Somali Government were unaware of whether the Soviets had built a special base at Berbera.<sup>478</sup> Similarly, the Yugoslav Ambassador to Mogadishu Janez Hočevar reported to Belgrade that the Russians used both their position of influence and the Somali ‘ignorance’ of the construction of a military complex, which

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<sup>476</sup> J. Matlock Jr, ‘TASS on Somali Base,’ 18 June 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOSCOW08486 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>477</sup> W. Stoessel Jr, ‘Pravda on Somalia,’ 1 July 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOSCOW09080 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>478</sup> J. Loughran, ‘Limits of Somali/Soviet Military Collusion: Lesson of Berbera,’ 8 August 1975, NARA Online, RG 59, DN: 1975MOGADI01169, RG59 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

served Moscow's strategic objectives in the region.<sup>479</sup> In the implementation of this programme, back in 1973 the Soviet Union installed a powerful telecommunication station near Berbera, which became a centre of Soviet operations in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. Moreover, Moscow was also allowed to use all Somali airports, and the Wanle Weyn airport near Mogadishu was extended by the Soviet specialists. It was reportedly designed to serve TU-95 reconnaissance over-flights of the northwest part of the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.<sup>480</sup>

Again, the Somali 'ignorance' of Soviet plans was also stressed by Senator Bartlett. He informed President Ford that he saw a Styx missile box in Berbera and the American technicians felt the Somalis knew nothing about it, as they did not even have any craft capable of using the Styx. In addition, the Americans were allowed to see the construction of a 17,000-foot runway, the largest airfield on the Indian Ocean littoral,<sup>481</sup> which according to the Chairman of the General Chief of Staff, General George Brown, was capable of accommodating heavy-loaded long-range bombers.<sup>482</sup> In Bartlett's assessment, the Somalis did not need such a long runway, which, quite perplexingly, Mogadishu claimed was used 'for flying cattle out.'<sup>483</sup>

Yet, the notion of a Somali lack of foreknowledge on the nature of Soviet facilities should be further scrutinised as on 14 July 1975 a senior Somali diplomat implied that the Soviet presence in Berbera was the price Somalia had had to pay for Soviet assistance.<sup>484</sup> The Somali leader thus made a bold gamble when he invited the American legislators and defence specialists. According to Western diplomats in

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<sup>479</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade no. 240, 12 July 1975, DAMSP-RS, f. PA [...Somaliya...] 1975, fasc. 223, dos. 6, sig. 435693, s. 1.

<sup>480</sup> Hocevar, 'Drustveno-ekonomska,' 15.

<sup>481</sup> Memcon, Cabinet Meeting, 16 July 1975, GRFL, NSA, b. 13, Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-7, f. Ford, Rumsfeld, Senators Dewey Bartlett and Robert Griffin.

<sup>482</sup> A. Yodfat, 'The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa, Part Two,' *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 1 (1980): 35.

<sup>483</sup> Memcon, Ford - Bartlett, Griffin, 7 July 1975, GRFL, NSA, b. 13.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Puzyrev, *Torgov'yi*, 30.

Mogadishu, Siad's move showed that he was by no means a Soviet puppet. Indeed, Moscow was believed to be unhappy with the Somali leader's desire to reaffirm his neutralist credentials.<sup>485</sup>

Siad's game became somewhat clearer when he told the members of Bartlett's delegation that he had invited them not to inspect Berbera, but to witness the devastating effects from the recent drought; he then took the visitors away to see refugee and relocation camps. Finally, the American delegation was left with the impression that 'Siad's hand of friendship was out to them.'<sup>486</sup> As a result, the American inspections led to a slight improvement in Somali-American relations and hinted at the need to extend US economic and humanitarian aid in order to match Moscow's assistance and provide additional manoeuvring space for the Somali leadership.<sup>487</sup> According to a Bulgarian report, while Somalia lacked any economic attractiveness, it possessed important strategic value, which attracted the attention of Moscow and Washington. As a result, the US was suspected of carefully monitoring the situation in the country and, eventually, the White House was 'to tilt the scales in its favour.'<sup>488</sup> In acknowledging the country's strategic value, on 27 July 1975, General Samatar released a statement, in which he made no effort to deny Soviet presence in Berbera. Similarly, the Somali Defence Minister did

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<sup>485</sup> R. Ingersoll, 'Washington Post Story on US-Somali Relations,' 14 July 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975STATE165098 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>486</sup> Memcon, Ford - Bartlett, Griffin, 7 July 1975.

<sup>487</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade no. 240, 12 July 1975, DAMSP-RS, f. PA [...Somaliya...] 1975, fasc. 223, dos. 6, sig. 435693, s. 1.

<sup>488</sup> Krastev, 'Polozhenieto v Somaliya,' DAMVnR-RB, s. 9, l. 20. Somali pragmatism had already been indicated in October 1974 when the Somali leader Siad Barre had offered the United States naval-base facilities at Chisimaio in the south, to balance the Soviet facilities at Berbera in the north. The American administration turned down this offer for fear of weakening the case for constructing the new Diego García base; See F. Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981), 224-5 and R. Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-alignment in the Third World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 207.

not attempt to ignore the strategic advantages of Berbera's location, which the country intended to exploit to the full for the 'benefit of its people, Africa, and Arab world.'<sup>489</sup>

In the final analysis, the Berbera affair speaks clearly about the mismatch between local intentions and superpower objectives. While the Somalis accepted Soviet military material and presence, they were less willing to allow the international community to perceive them as mere puppets of foreign powers. Siad's decision to invite the Americans to inspect the site served a multi-layered purpose. While Moscow was not happy with the Somali President's move, he wanted to demonstrate his independence. On the other hand, he wanted to distance himself from any potential Soviet designs in the wider region. Additionally, Siad's manoeuvre was particularly shrewd as it aimed to reach out to Washington at a time of severe hardship for the Somali economy, which had been exacerbated by adverse weather conditions. The affair was, therefore, an open demonstration of Siad's foreign policy neutralism, which aimed to obtain assistance from as many sources as possible, ranging from the Eastern Bloc, through the Western capitalist states, and finishing with the Arab World.

### III. 6. Mogadishu, Moscow and the Arab League

Another statement of Siad's multi-polar foreign policy is evident in Somalia's joining of the Arab league, despite it not being an Arab state. Again, the local pull proved to be the crucial factor that led to the accession to the League. In addition, it also appears that Moscow was informed in advance, and showed no objection to Somali plans. No clear evidence is available, however, of direct Soviet influence over Siad's decision to join the League. It seems plausible, though, that the Kremlin sought to take advantage of

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<sup>489</sup> J. Loughran, 'Soviet Base Issue: Somali Denials Continue,' 29 July 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI01109 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

Somalia's accession by attempting to win over lost positions within the Arab World, following the end of the October war, when Moscow was steadily excluded from the Middle Eastern process by Washington, Tel Aviv, and Cairo.

### III. 6.1 Somalia's joining the Arab League

Somalia's geographical location facilitated the development of close contacts with the Arab states. Following the 1969 coup, however, serious cooling in relations with the Arab countries occurred with Siad's attempts to marry Muslim beliefs with Socialism. In late 1972, when Somalia introduced the Latin script and nationalised all schools, including the Arabic ones, 300 Egyptian teachers, working in the country at Cairo's expense, declared a strike. The changed international situation after the October War, however, led to a positive turn in Somali-Arab relations. In an attempt to make amends, Siad took the side of the Arab states in their fight against Israel. The political support given by Mogadishu to Cairo provided a significant influence in changing Arab opinion of the Somali regime.<sup>490</sup> At the end of January 1974, in search of political support for Somali 'national-liberation struggle',<sup>491</sup> Siad completed a three-week trip to seven Arab Peninsula countries. As a back-up exercise, Siad's Foreign Secretary embarked on trips to Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus and various Maghreb capitals.<sup>492</sup> Almost immediately after completing the tour, on 16 February 1974, Mogadishu was admitted to full membership of the Arab league.

However, Somalia's joining the Arab league did not alter the fundamentals of Moscow's relations with Mogadishu.<sup>493</sup> The Soviet fisheries minister, Ishkov, for

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<sup>490</sup> 'Úroveň styků Somálská demokratické republiky s arabskými zeměmi. Politická zpráva č.3,' 15 March 1974, AMZV, f. TO-T, 1970-74, kr. Somálsko, 1, sv. 239/111, 1, ss. 1-3.

<sup>491</sup> Soviet Embassy, Sofia [Information on the official visit by N. Podgorny to Somalia], 31 July 1974, DAMVnR-RB, f. P., op. 25p, d. 24, pr. 230, s. 2, l. 19.

<sup>492</sup> R. Gozney, 'Somalia Joins the Arab League,' 20 February 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1745, fo. 3.

<sup>493</sup> R. Lyons, 'The USSR, China and the Horn of Africa,' *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 12 (1978): 16.

example, spent a full week in Somalia in late April 1974 – and supposedly talked about more than fish, according to the US Ambassador, Kirk. Apparently, the Arab link did not bother the Soviet ambassador, either. After initially displaying ‘considerable nervousness and irritation over the Somali move,’ he returned to his usual confident self,<sup>494</sup> when Mogadishu reportedly claimed its readiness to work for the strengthening of the ‘progressive elements’ in the League,<sup>495</sup> where nine out of twenty-one member states were relying on Soviet military supplies.<sup>496</sup>

Given that the signing of the Somali-Soviet Friendship Treaty took place after Mogadishu’s joining the League in February, the American Embassy’s speculation that Siad's Arab League decision was ‘most surely endorsed by Soviets because of political and strategic advantages it brought them,’ should not be entirely dismissed. Although there is no concrete evidence, it is clear the Russians knew about Somali plans to join the League in advance and did not object to them. The information on the forthcoming accession to the Arab League was kept in utmost secrecy within the Somali leadership. Only a handful of senior ministers and members of the SRC had prior knowledge of it. A week before joining the League, Siad had a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador who recommended that the forthcoming event be made public and be subjected to discussion in wider political circles. Besides, Siad explained to members of the SRC and to the Soviet Ambassador that despite joining the Arab League, Mogadishu would continue to follow its policy of Scientific Socialism and develop the closest cooperation with the USSR, which Somalia considered ‘as guarantor of its independence and development.’<sup>497</sup>

The Somali President’s refusal to surrender the Marxist tint to his socialist policies and to loosen ties with Moscow, did not prevent him from participating in the League’s

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<sup>494</sup> R. Kirk, ‘Somali-Arab Relations,’ 13 May 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974MOGADI00662 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

<sup>495</sup> Information on Podgorny’s visit, DAMVnR-RB, s. 230.

<sup>496</sup> F. Halliday, ‘The Arc of Crisis and the New Cold War,’ *MERIP Reports*, no. 100/101, (1981): 18.

<sup>497</sup> ‘Úroveň styků Somálská,’ 3-4.

affairs. It should be accepted then that Siad's goals in the Organisation until the 1975 drought were not only motivated by economic gains, but also informed by political considerations, which ultimately served Soviet regional interests.<sup>498</sup> In the final analysis, taking into account Siad's neutralist line, this can be perceived as a coincidence of interests between Mogadishu and Moscow, rather than the result of the Kremlin's direct influence.

On the other hand, the Saudis with the Egyptians used the Arab League against member states' progressive regimes, dedicated to 'destroying Soviet influence everywhere in the Red Sea area.'<sup>499</sup> All along, the Saudis pressed Siad to limit his reliance on Moscow in exchange for economic assistance. On 5 May 1975, the Somali President met with the Saudi Crown Prince Fahd who criticised Siad for allowing a strategic part of Africa and the Arab/Muslim world to become 'a thriving refuge for communists.'<sup>500</sup> In a bid to bring about a change in the situation, later, in July, the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince, Saud Al Faisal, inquired with the American Ambassador in Jidda if Washington was prepared to give economic assistance to Somalia. The Saudis were willing to offer US\$30m to Mogadishu only if the US agreed to match it.<sup>501</sup> Nevertheless, Washington was not ready to take part in the operation, as a joint US-Saudi effort to replace the Soviets as aid donors to Somalia was to touch a sensitive nerve in Ethiopia. The US also feared that if Siad became less dependent on Moscow he would

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<sup>498</sup> S. Hamrick, 'Siad, The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,' 7 April 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975MOGADI00506 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>499</sup> R. Legvold, 'The Super Rivals: Conflict in the Third World,' *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 4 (1979): 763.

<sup>500</sup> For more details on Saudi attempts to curb Soviet influence in Somalia see R. Kirk, 'Saudi-Somali relations,' 14 September 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974MOGADI01403 [accessed on 13 December 2008] and J. Akins, 'Visit of Somali President to Saudi Arabia,' 6 May 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975JIDDA03197 [accessed on 13 December 2008]; Cf. D. Laitin, 'Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism,' in *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. C. Rosberg and T. Callagy (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1979), 195.

<sup>501</sup> Horan, 'Soviet Presence in Somalia,' 16 July 1975, DN: 1975JIDDA05069 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

find himself less affected by Soviet restraints,<sup>502</sup> and he might become more willing to engage in a military campaign against Ethiopia.

Therefore, with no immediate reason to soft pedal his Soviet connections, Siad began to praise Moscow's contribution to his country. The reason for his public gratitude was the announcement of new US\$60m Soviet economic assistance package, aimed at resettling drought-affected areas.<sup>503</sup> Nevertheless, while, it is unclear if Moscow had any intelligence on the Saudi efforts prior to launching its large assistance project, in political terms, Soviet help enabled Siad to hit back at quiet criticism on the lack of Soviet generosity. Crucially, in practical terms, the execution of the airlift gave the Soviet Air Force the operational experience of using both newly expanded airfields in Wanle Weyn and Chisimaio.<sup>504</sup> Importantly, the temporary hiatus in Siad-Arab League relations and the Soviet response to Somali pleas for assistance had played a decisive part in improving Mogadishu's relations with Moscow in 1976.

### III. 6.2 Resurgence of Somali-Soviet political ties in 1975-6

The decline of Somalia's interest in the Arab world, and the simultaneous improvement of Soviet standing in Somalia became noticeable in 1975 and continued throughout 1976. Siad was well aware of the damage done by the execution of the ten sheikhs and mullahs in January 1975 to his hopes of Arab aid. In addition, the postponement of the 1975 Arab League Summit, which Siad hoped to host, further cooled the relations between

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<sup>502</sup> A. Hummel Jr, 'Soviet Presence In Somalia,' 1 August 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975ADDIS09285 [accessed on 13 December 2008].

<sup>503</sup> Close to 100,000 nomads were flown by Soviet transport planes to potentially fertile regions in Southern Somalia. In addition, another 80,000 Somalis were taken by Soviet trucks to the coast of the Gulf of Aden in order to be re-settled as fishermen, while about 90,000 kept their nomadic lifestyle, but in less affected parts of the highlands. H. Tanner, 'Somali Nomads Being Shifted to New Lives,' *New York Times*, 12 July 1975, 2 and 'Moscow Airlifts 120,000 Somali Nomads,' *New York Times*, 26 October 1975, p. 54. See also S. Hamrick, 'Soviet-Somali Relations: Back to Normalcy,' 23 June 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975JIDDA04537 [accessed on 13 December 2008]. See also J. Shaw, 'Soviet Position in Somalia,' 7 October 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1927, fo. 19.

<sup>504</sup> J. Shaw, 'Soviet-Somali Relations,' 26 June 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1927, fo. 17

Mogadishu and its 'Arab brothers'<sup>505</sup> In return, Siad took a course of more openly promoting Soviet-Somali relationships, which seemed friendlier than ever.<sup>506</sup>

Siad visited Moscow in February-March 1976 to attend the 25th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, praising the Kremlin's role in the struggle for peace and relaxation of international tensions. Moreover, the Somali president met Nikolai Podgorny on 11 March. In the meeting, it was claimed that the 1974 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, not only firmly sealed their close relationships, but also 'opened up opportunities for further in-depth and long-term co-operation in the interests of both peoples.'<sup>507</sup> Accordingly, Siad's presence at the Congress indicated Somalia's strategic and political importance, which was increasingly becoming dependent on the Kremlin. Arab diplomats, such as those of Egypt, Sudan, Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia apparently showed their disagreement with Siad's statement on the increased Soviet importance in Somalia. Moreover, some of the Arab representatives criticised Siad for not sending to the Congress one of his Vice Presidents, which they saw as a way of distancing Somalia from the Arab community.<sup>508</sup>

Importantly for Moscow, seven years after the October coup, the formal establishment of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) became a fact. The Party took over the Government's functions and led to the establishment of even closer relations with the Kremlin.<sup>509</sup> Also, important for the development of inter-party cooperation between the CPSU and the SRSP were the talks in Moscow between the Somali party-government delegation in August 1976. The head of the mission, the SRSP Politburo member and first Vice-President of SDR, Mohamed Ali Samatar, met with the CPSU

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<sup>505</sup> J. Shaw, 'Somalia and the Arab League,' 29 April 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1926, fo. 1.

<sup>506</sup> Letter, Gundersen to Johnson, 'Somali/Soviet Relations,' 2 February 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2132, fo. 1.

<sup>507</sup> TASS, 'Vstrecha N. V. Podgornogo s Mohamedom Siadom Barre,' *Izvestiya*, 12 March 1976, 1.

<sup>508</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade, 18 March 1974, no. 49357, DAMSP-RS, f. PA [... Somalija ...] 1976, fasc. 227, dos. 6, sig. 415633, s. 1ff.

<sup>509</sup> A. Gundersen, 'Somali Democratic Republic: Annual Review for 1976,' 27 January 1977, FCO 31/2129, fo. 6.

Politburo member, Andrei Kirilenko, and the candidate member and Secretary of the CPSU CC, Boris Ponomarev. In the meetings, the Somali guests expressed their support for CPSU's positions on key international issues, including Africa, showing the agreement in the foreign political lines of the two parties.<sup>510</sup> While, the Soviet-Somali party relations were improving, the rapid change in the political situation across the border, in Ethiopia, put a severe strain on Moscow's relations with Somalia in the following year.

### III. 7. Conclusion

Soviet policy in Somalia in the first half of 1970s, partly shaped by broader strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, was largely one of making use of opportunities. Siad's concentration on progressive nation-building at home and his acceptance of more advanced Soviet weapons on Somali soil, served not only to protect Somalia from 'forces of reaction,' but also appeared to advance the Soviets' strategic ambitions in the area.<sup>511</sup> Although Moscow provided the largest single foreign contingent in Somalia, the Soviet ability to influence Mogadishu's government seemed relatively limited. Soviet advisers, no less than any other foreign aides, were subject to surveillance by the NSS, itself tutored by the Soviet KGB. The Russians had a remarkably small number of acknowledged friends and sympathisers within the Somali Government, such as the Defence Minister, and among the civilians the Finance Minister, Mohamed Yusuf Weyrah. Despite this, it seems far-fetched to assume that the Soviet Ambassador was the *eminence grise* of the Somali Government, as he was presumed to be by Western and Arab observers.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Report by N. Gaevoi, second secretary, Soviet Embassy in Mogadishu, on SRSP's International connections, RGANI, f. 5, o. 73, d. 1619, ll. 1-13, in NSA, REEAD, b. 12.

<sup>511</sup> S. Hamrick, 'Siad, The Soviet Union and Ethiopia,' 7 April 1975, NARA Online.

<sup>512</sup> J. Shaw, 'Somalia and the Soviet Union,' 7 May 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1746, fo. 3.

Despite its interest and investment in Mogadishu, the Kremlin kept a vigilant eye on the situation in Ethiopia. Yet their ties with Somalia made the Ethiopians highly suspicious of Moscow's intentions. Neither side seemed interested in utilising the US\$100m credit line, extended in 1959, of which only US\$18m had been drawn. To Addis Ababa, the financial terms seemed too harsh, and there were complaints about low-quality Soviet equipment. As a result, the Soviet Union assigned low priority to Ethiopia at the time, recognising the limited opportunities there.<sup>513</sup> The rapid change in the Ethiopian situation in the early 1974, however, presented the Kremlin with a new set of issues. Eventually, the events of the spring of 1974 paved the way for the crucial role Moscow came to play in the region towards the end of the decade.

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<sup>513</sup> Horn of Africa, Study Pursuant to NSSM 184, 6 July 1973, NACP.

## Chapter Four

### **Walking the tightrope between ‘Revolution Square’ and Pax Aethiopica:**

February 1974 - December 1976

#### IV. 1. Introduction

In early 1974, sweeping changes took place on the Ethiopian domestic scene. In spite of Emperor's overthrow and the spread of leftist sentiments within the Ethiopia's new military government, the initial stage in the deepening of the Soviet-Ethiopian relations, culminated merely in a spell of diplomatic activity in the latter half of 1975 and throughout 1976. The increased exchange of economic, political, cultural, and religious delegations between Addis Ababa and Moscow, Prague, Berlin, Sofia, and Belgrade, however, had more of a formal character. While Ethiopia was hoping to receive tangible assistance, Moscow and its East-European allies showed no eagerness to provide it just yet. More importantly, Moscow demonstrated that it saw military assistance as subject to meeting certain criteria, including making progress in other fields of cooperation, such as the political, economic, and cultural.

The road to obtaining full Soviet support, however, took probably longer than the Ethiopian military would have wanted. To the Derg, Soviet aid was an urgent matter of survival, at a time, when other external sources of military material had dried up. However, up until the spring of 1977, Moscow regarded the prospect of furnishing Ethiopia with the levels of military support it demanded as nothing more than a long-term project. This period clearly demonstrates Moscow's cautious approach to interpreting and reacting to local developments. The Soviets approach was motivated by its presence in

Somalia, and, conversely, the lack of certainty surrounding the future prospects of Ethiopia's regime, and the US presence in Addis Ababa. Importantly, Soviet, as well as other Bloc, diplomats played an instrumental part in translating the Derg's needs into the Kremlin's language. In addition, Soviet and Bloc envoys played a key role in helping Ethiopia's inexperienced military rulers comprehend Moscow's demands. They helped Moscow understand how the local story interacted with broader Soviet policy objectives.

#### IV. 2. Ethiopia's reactions to Soviet-Somali relations

The early 1970s brought about a marked decrease of Ethiopia's importance for the US. In an attempt to replicate his earlier strategy in calling for Eastern support, Haile Selassie embarked on diplomatic shuttles to Beijing, Moscow, and Belgrade. None of these trips, however, led to a qualitative improvement in the regime's foreign standing. Gradually, Haile Selassie's regime came to lose its attractiveness to both camps and the rapidly deteriorating domestic situation opened up the opportunity for the widespread discontent with the regime, weakening its power base at home. Arguably, local developments created opportunities for Moscow to engage; yet, the Kremlin was in no hurry. Its representatives watched worriedly as the Regime collapsed.

##### IV. 2.1 Washington's gradual withdrawal of support to Haile Selassie's regime

An important factor in Washington's relations with the regime of the ageing Emperor was played by the development in the Middle East. In the early 1970s, tensions in the wider region seriously altered Ethiopia's regional standing. The Arab-Israeli conflict and the superpowers' interests in it had a lasting effect upon the Emperor's foreign policy. Following the October 1973 war, African states began severing diplomatic relations with

Israel, one after the other. Haile Selassie followed suit, and, on 23 October, he terminated diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv. Thus, the *Ancien regime* lost a traditional ally in Israel without securing any hard assurances of Arab neutrality on Ethiopia's problems on the periphery, mainly in the Ogaden and Eritrea. As a result, Addis Ababa also suffered relegation to the outer perimeters of US security policy priorities. Accordingly, it was no longer justifiable for Washington to furnish aid to Ethiopia on the grounds of the country's important position for Israel's strategic interests.<sup>515</sup>

In May 1973, Haile Selassie visited the US President, Nixon, in Washington. During the meeting, the Emperor expounded that the balance of forces in the Horn had changed radically, owing to the rapid expansion of Soviet influence in the region. According to Haile Selassie, the Kremlin's regional tactics included the strengthening of the Arab states and the weakening of Ethiopia. Nixon, however, pointed out that it would be difficult to obtain a substantial appropriation through Congress. He also stressed that, while it would be 'a tragedy' if Ethiopia were subjected to new aggression, the US could not afford a conflict with the USSR over areas of such value as the Middle East.<sup>516</sup> To complicate the Ethiopian-US relations further, in October 1973 Washington told the Imperial regime of its intention to close the Kagnew communications facilities which was one of the key factors that had brought the two governments together in the first place. The US, as a result, pushed Ethiopia to the fringe of its international priorities. Moreover, there were no instructions from the State Department to the Embassy to preserve relationships. Under Kissinger, the State Department saw international affairs in a global

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<sup>515</sup> Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 32; see also Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 219.

<sup>516</sup> See Memcon, Nixon - Haile Selassie, 15 May 1973, GRFL, NSA, Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-7, b. 1, f. May 15, 1973 - Nixon, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie; cf. Andargachew, *The Ethiopian revolution*, 32.

context, rather than in a regional one and this, to a certain extent, explains why Ethiopia became a 'second-hand' player in America's foreign policy.<sup>517</sup>

#### IV. 2.2 Haile Selassie turns to the East, again

Sensing a change in Washington's attitudes towards Ethiopia, the Emperor resorted to his old strategy of playing the Eastern card, in an attempt to regain White House interest and strengthen the country's non-aligned stance. Additionally, the lack of military assistance options supposedly dampened Emperor's suspicion of Moscow's intentions.<sup>518</sup> In late October 1973, a few months after meeting Nixon, Haile Selassie embarked on a trip to Moscow. The Emperor's initiative apparently yielded a restrained response from the Kremlin. Reportedly, the Emperor wanted to exchange views on Ethiopian-Somali affairs with the Kremlin leaders after visiting the US, in May, and was also willing to address the stagnation in Ethiopian-Soviet relations.<sup>519</sup> Little is known of the actual talks between Haile Selassie and Podgorny, with only scant coverage in the press. The communiqué issued after the talks, lacked 'any real substance,' which according to the British Embassy in Moscow was a signal that the Ethiopian-Soviet positions were 'pretty far apart' and the Emperor 'did not appear to have much to show for his 'business visit' to the Soviet capital.<sup>520</sup>

On his trip to Moscow, Haile Selassie also included a stop in Belgrade where he reportedly sought to replace the Israelis with Yugoslav military advisers. Furthermore, the Ethiopians hinted that they might turn to Beijing for help, as well.<sup>521</sup> The Ethiopian decision to recognise the PRC in November 1970, and the Emperor's subsequent visit to China, in October 1971, resulted in immediate and tangible benefits for the African

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<sup>517</sup> Interview with A. Lewis, 6 September 1989, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>518</sup> Memo, Ethiopian-US Relations, 1 November 1973, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP85T00875R001100160069-4.

<sup>519</sup> Cipher, Adis Abeba to Belgrade, no. 312, 24 October 1973, AJ, f. 837, KPR I-3-a/24-30, ss. 1-3.

<sup>520</sup> Guy, 'Visit of Emperor Haile Selassie to the Soviet Union,' 6 November 1973, TNA, FCO 31/1465, fo. 5.

<sup>521</sup> Memo on Ethiopian-US Relations, 1 November 1973, CREST.

country. Beijing pledged to end its support to the ELF and assured Addis Ababa that the military aid, supplied to Somalia would not be delivered to anti-Ethiopian movements. The Chinese were also willing to extend a US\$ 84-million interest-free credit for development projects.<sup>522</sup> By taking into account Addis Abba's domestic needs, the Chinese were attempting to convince Ethiopia's leadership to follow the Chinese model.<sup>523</sup> Evidently, Haile Selassie enjoyed the positives of recognising Beijing, at a time when striking a balance between the superpowers proved once again crucial for Ethiopia's survival.<sup>524</sup>

However, it was the rapid deterioration in Ethiopia's precarious domestic situation that came to worsen international community's attitude towards the ageing Emperor. In the final analysis, Haile Selassie's manoeuvring with the East in 1973 failed to achieve the success of the early 1960s when he used the Soviets to regain America's favour. Another complication demonstrated America's altered perception of Ethiopia's regional significance. In January 1974, the US Ambassador Ross Adair, became ill and returned to the US. Washington left in charge of its Embassy a Deputy Chief of Mission until March 1975. Although, this owed much to the distractions of the Watergate affair, it was also caused by the existence of more pressing foreign-policy concerns in the Middle and the Far East.<sup>525</sup> The determining factor in discouraging Washington from extending additional military and political support for Haile Selassie was the regime's inability to face up to the disastrous aftermath of the 1972-3 widespread famine in Ethiopia's North.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Horn of Africa, Study Pursuant to NSSM 184, 6 July 1973, NACP.

<sup>523</sup> KGB Reference no. 147, 'O politika KNR v Afrike,' 16 March 1974, AMVR, f. 1, op. 10, a.e. 2080, s. 2, l. 173.

<sup>524</sup> T. Ribarov, 'Informatsiya otnosno sŭstoyanieto na etiopsko-kitaiskite otnosheniya pri noviya voenen rezhim v Etiopiya,' 3 December 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 31, d. 82, pr. 1281, s. 1, l. 109.

<sup>525</sup> Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence*, 102, cf. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 175.

<sup>526</sup> Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 219; Additionally, in the summer of 1973, a London journalist, Jonathan Dimbleby, was dispatched to broadcast the devastating effects of the famine. Upon his return to England, Dimbleby showed his film *Ethiopia: The Unknown Famine* on which thousands of people were caught dying of hunger. This grim display was in stark contrast with Haile Selassie's feasts with his court members and dignitaries. See R. Kapuściński, *The Emperor*, 108-9.

### IV. 3. Ethiopia's creeping coup

The Imperial Regime's inadequate reaction to the deteriorating Ethiopian internal situation became not only evident to the West, but also played a decisive part in changing Moscow's attitude, determining the direction of Soviet involvement in the country. Addis Ababa had proved unable to cope with the growing humanitarian crisis and to adapt to the changing face of Ethiopia's political life, marked by steady growth of social tensions in both the centre and the periphery. As a result, the rapid radicalisation of Ethiopia led to massive strikes in Addis Ababa and unrest in the army. While the Soviet diplomats and their European allies considered the events to be cutting deep into the fabric of Ethiopia's society, Moscow's Embassy took a cautious stance. It attempted to convey its concern through its communication with the Centre, suggesting that the Kremlin retain ties with the Emperor's Regime until domestic prospects were clearer.

#### IV. 3.1 KGB on the situation in Ethiopia in 1972-3

Reflecting upon the internal economic crisis, in early November 1973, the KGB Resident in Ethiopia despatched a harsh report to Moscow, painting a very grim picture of the Imperial Regime's prospects for survival. According to the memorandum, the severe drought revealed the inability of the Ethiopian social and political system to solve the critical problems facing the country. The Emperor's failure to alleviate the acute political crisis, stimulated 'fervent progressive tendencies' among the intelligentsia and students and intensified the disturbances within the peasantry. The adverse weather conditions led to starvation for several million people and outbursts of cholera and infectious diseases. The

Government's attempt to raise funds and tackle the dire situation in the most affected parts of the Empire were seen by Soviet intelligence as clearly inadequate and ineffective.<sup>527</sup>

Additionally, the KGB saw the situation in the countryside as particularly dangerous. Although, the Emperor attempted to sow discord between the various Eritrean factions, their leaders continued to engage in preparation for a new offensive against the Regime. A new element in their activities was to form a united front with all progressive forces in the country against the Emperor. Fearing widespread opposition, Addis Ababa resorted to punitive measures in controlling the countryside, using a comprehensive system of espionage. The Russians in Ethiopia, however, acknowledged that, despite the difficult conditions on the ground, the regime succeeded in maintaining reasonable order in the country. This was credited more to the lack of organisation within the opposition, rather than to the effectiveness of Haile Selassie's counter-measures. Anti-Government forces, such as minorities in the provinces, students, and intellectuals, in spite of their common goal, had no strong ties with the masses and lacked their support.<sup>528</sup>

#### IV. 3.2 The Soviet Bloc and Ethiopia prior to the February riots

Moscow observers also reported tensions within the 'feudal-bourgeois' group supporting Haile Selassie. It resulted from the expectation of the imminent departure of the ageing Emperor from the political arena. Significantly, months before the outbreak of the February strikes, the KGB's information suggested that the Emperor's close circles did not exclude the possibility of the military, led by the Air Force commander, Abie Abebe, coming to power in the event of his death. Nevertheless, at this stage, it appeared that, even if the military claimed power, the domestic, or the foreign orientation of the country

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<sup>527</sup> KGB Reference no. 656, 'O vnutripoliticheskoj obstanovke v Éfiopii (obzor svedenii),' 2 November 1973, AMVR, f.1, op. 10, a.e. 1971, ss. 1-2, ll. 161-2.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 2.

would not be significantly changed.<sup>529</sup> The KGB's conclusion found resonance in another significant Bloc assessment on the internal situation in Ethiopia. In January 1974, the Czechoslovakians noted, that regardless of the on-going process of differentiation within the Ethiopian society, the ruling circles continued to display anti-Communist tendencies, manifested in both their actions and ideology.<sup>530</sup>

The main instrument of the Government's anti-communist policy was the use of a complex system of censorship, led by a centralised agency within the Ministry of Information. The regime imposed strict rules on publications, originating from the socialist countries, subjected to strict regulations and prior approval. Nevertheless, these draconian measures, according to the Czechoslovak report, failed to achieve their objectives. Soviet Bloc, therefore, was able to overcome existing difficulties and barriers through the promotion and the development of cultural and educational relations. Specifically, in countering anti-communist tendencies Prague's Embassy and other Bloc representations in Addis Ababa aimed to increase promotional activities and to revitalise and expand their impact on the widest spectrum of the Ethiopian society.

Accordingly, quite an important task for the future of the Bloc's relations with Ethiopia was the establishment of contacts with representatives of the country's 'young bourgeoisie.' In order to improve their understanding of the development of anti-communist sentiments, the Czechoslovakians planned a meeting with the heads of the Bloc embassies in February 1974.<sup>531</sup> Throughout the year, the Soviet Union and its allies in Addis Ababa closely monitored the rapid changes in Ethiopia in an attempt to assess the viability of the transformations, undertaken in the country. Accordingly, the spread of

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>530</sup> 'Projevy antikomunismu v Etiopii,' 17 January 1974, AMZV, f. TO-T 1970-1974, kr. Ekvádor, Etiopie, 1, sv. 212/111, s. 1.

<sup>531</sup> 'Projevy antikomunismu v Etiopii,' 17 January 1974, AMZV, s. 4.

discontent, which went beyond civilian circles, in late February, gradually altered the Bloc's future prospects in the country.

#### IV. 3.3 Soviet initial reaction to the 1974 coup

Following the February upheaval, the Soviet Embassy from the outset recognised the progressive potential of the political unrest in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, the Moscow's representation maintained the cautious line, similar to the one developed during the Siad Barre's coup in Somalia, five years earlier, in an attempt to avoid Government suspicion of their spreading leftist sentiments. In addition, in a marked contrast to the 1960 coup, over the summer, Moscow's envoys came to realise that the changes in the country were irreversible and were bound to endure. Finally, but significantly, the widespread appeal of the strikes, and the radical movement within the army gave weight to this assessment. Importantly, in an attempt to amalgamate the Cominternist and Narkomindel policy lines, while acknowledging the potential for significant reform in Ethiopia, Moscow decided to take a circumspect position until the situation became clearer

The mass strikes, launched by various segments of the population, including taxi drivers and school teachers, demanding improvement in the quality of life, unleashed waves of discontent towards the ruling 'feudal-bureaucratic' regime. The success of the early-1974 movement, however, was seen to be largely due to the inclusion of the armed forces, which gradually became a central political force.<sup>532</sup> A mutiny in the Ethiopian army's Second Division and Second Air Group in Asmara followed the civilian unrest. Consequently, the heavy pressure on the Regime prompted the Emperor to launch conciliatory measures, aiming to heal various societal fissures. A new Cabinet, headed by

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<sup>532</sup> 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' 19 July 1974, NAČR, f. A ÚV KSČ Gustav Husák, Etiopie, sv. 982, a.j. 9908, s. 17.

Endelkachew Makonnen, was formed, and the Emperor announced a major institutional reform, giving higher prerogatives to the Parliament.

In the eyes of the diplomats of the Soviet Bloc, Ethiopia was believed to be entering a new phase in its development. It was expected that this phase would be marked by significant changes in its domestic and foreign policies, which were likely to coincide with the Soviet Union's interests in the region as a whole.<sup>533</sup> However, in its work, Moscow's leading diplomats realised the necessity to exercise increased caution in order not to give reason to be suspected of interfering in the country's affairs, especially in supporting 'leftist extremists.' The embassy suggested to Moscow that it might wish to 'take an extremely circumspect position, preserve loyal ties with the Emperor, and, at the same time, not alienate the new forces.'<sup>534</sup> There were also increased opportunities before the Soviets for the establishment of contacts with trade unionists, intellectuals, students, and military representatives, who became frequent guests of the Embassy's Permanent Exhibition.

Similarly, comments in Moscow on the Ethiopian situation initially were fairly restrained. From 23 February, the central press carried a series of short TASS bulletins; only on 1 March, did *Pravda* elevated these to the headlines on the international news page. The first commentary in *Pravda* of 10 March was relatively moderate and claimed that the disturbances in the army had brought the social crisis in the country to a head, after which Ethiopia had arrived at the threshold of a serious societal change. Two days later, *Izvestiya* published another commentary, which underlined Moscow's caution in handling the subject. It highlighted the conviction that 'imperialist forces' would have liked to exploit the situation in the Horn, and kindle hostility between African countries.

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<sup>533</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 191ff.

<sup>534</sup> Soviet Embassy, Addis Ababa, report to Foreign Minister Gromyko, March 1974, RGANI, f. 5, op. 67, d. 796, l. 40; 46, cited in Westad, *Global Cold War*, 261.

<sup>535</sup> Thus, it seems that Moscow's position on the Ethiopian upheaval, followed, or at least was, in agreement with its representatives' recommendations.

Moscow's envoys exercised prudence in holding a firm principal line in their estimations and proposals. According to the second man at the Embassy, Sergei Sinitsyn, since the beginning of the February events, the representation favoured consolidation of Ethiopian-Soviet relations by supporting the progressive trends and linkages within the new political forces. It also aimed at maintaining a 'dignified and effective' presence, in order to be better able to expand the Kremlin's influence in the Horn if progressive forces took the upper hand.<sup>536</sup>

In order to meet this objective, Moscow's envoys enlisted their Bloc allies' support. Soviet Embassy staff consulted and exchanged information with their Czechoslovakian colleagues mainly on the internal development in Ethiopia, focusing on the propaganda, cultural, and press activities of the Emperor's regime. This co-operation aimed to achieve a better understanding of the situation in Ethiopia, needed for the development of an insightful long-term plan for their work.<sup>537</sup> With the pro-active Ambassador Ratanov, the Soviet representation came to play a crucial role in linking Addis Ababa and Moscow, following the arrival of the military junta on the political scene in the summer of 1974. Consequently, local representatives assumed the crucial role of interpreting the Derg's requests in the Kremlin's language. Moreover, Soviet and Bloc diplomats helped Ethiopia's new military rulers understand Moscow's demands for embarking on universal co-operation.

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<sup>535</sup> R. Lyne, 'The USSR and the Disturbances in Ethiopia,' 12 March 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1683, fo. 1.

<sup>536</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 198-9.

<sup>537</sup> 'Zpráva o konzultaci s velvyslancem SSSR v Etiopii s. Ščiborinem,' 24 April 1974, AMZV, f. TO-T 1970-1974, kr. Ekvádor, Etiopie, 1, sv. 212/111 8, ss. 1-2.

#### IV. 4. The ascent of the Derg

Another local development called for additional assessment and even closer observation on the part of the Bloc's representatives. The rise to power of the radical group within the Derg did not cause an immediately positive reaction from the Soviet Union and its allies. On the contrary, the Bloc's diplomats, while acknowledging the revolutionary zeal of Ethiopia's radical forces, watched the situation in the country with concern. The internecine conflict within the military and the spread of discontent in the provinces provided the forces of the 'reaction' with an opportunity to suffocate the processes of societal transformations.

##### IV. 4.1 The creation of the AFCC

The Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army (AFCC), that surfaced at the end of June,<sup>538</sup> was bent on solidifying its firm grip on power and becoming the '*de facto* sovereign authority.'<sup>539</sup> Soviet Bloc diplomats saw the rise of the Coordinating Committee as a result of Haile Selassie's failure to suppress the call for radical social and economic reforms. From March to June, Ethiopia had a civilian government subjected to pressure and interference from armed forces dissidents who, at the time, lacked both cohesion and direction. In June, with the help of the local police, the forces of restoration managed to calm the situation in the provinces and regained some positions in the army. The right wing, attempted to delay the implementation of the reforms promised by the Emperor. Realising, however, that domestic political process

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<sup>538</sup> According to KGB, the Ethiopian armed forces since mid-April operated as a national central committee, based on the regional military units of the Ethiopian army. In the interest of security of the AFCC, members were selected from different garrisons and their names were kept in deep secret. In the case of treason, or mass defection of members a reserve committee was to assume leadership of the movement if necessary. See KGB Reference no. 855, 'O polozenii v Éfiopii,' 12 July 1974, AMVR, f.1, op. 10, a.e. 2083, s. 1, l. 15.

<sup>539</sup> W/ Morris, 'Deposition of Emperor,' 16 September 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1681, fo. 13.

might turn the country to the right, the left-wing army forces were determined to act decisively in a bid to rescue the reform movement and their own lives.<sup>540</sup>

As a result, the formation of the AFCC was a turning point in giving a sense of direction to the spontaneous uprising of late-February. In its rise to power, the Committee first requested that the Emperor grant it permission to work in close association with Endelkachew's cabinet. This 'marriage of convenience' proved to be short-lived. The military withdrew its support and launched attempts to take action independently from the civilian government. The Prime Minister's optimism soon evaporated as he saw through the ploys of the AFCC's leadership; in no time, the military forced Endelkachew to resign.<sup>541</sup>

The Russians, therefore, saw the advent of the Coordinating Committee, as a result of Haile Selassie's failure to overturn the demand for radical social-economic reforms. The army's middle ranks, the students, and the workers' saw this as justification of their view that the Emperor and the Endelkachew Cabinet's intended to keep themselves in power against the will of the masses.<sup>542</sup> The Czechoslovakian diplomats summarised the Bloc's assessment, according to which the struggle within the reform movement in the civilian population and the army clashed with the forces of reaction. The latter aimed to prevent the implementation of the transformation, retaining their political and economic privileges.<sup>543</sup> Following the reaction of the army's middle ranks to right-wing advances, a trend towards further radicalisation of the military, tinged with semi-Marxist propaganda, was launched.<sup>544</sup> Although, from Moscow's point of view this might have seemed as a positive development, it prompted Soviet Bloc's diplomats, while witnessing the proliferation of civil strife and the advancement of centrifugal forces

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<sup>540</sup> 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' NAČR, 2-3.

<sup>541</sup> Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 121ff.

<sup>542</sup> KGB no. 855, 1.

<sup>543</sup> 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' 17-8.

<sup>544</sup> P. Wyman, 'Implications for the U.S. of Increasing Radicalization of the Ethiopian Revolution,' 9 July 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974ADDIS10686 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

on the edges of the Empire, to question the Regime's chances of survival. It was far from stable, and the West was seen lurking behind the scene, trying to take advantage of the conflicts within the military.<sup>545</sup>

#### IV. 4.2 Bloc's assessment of Western attitudes towards army's radicalisation

The radicalisation in the army and the resurgence of the military rulers reportedly motivated Washington to attempt to curb Ethiopia's gradual turn to the left. While Washington was seen by the Bloc's observers as willing to take advantage of the situation in Ethiopia, the Bloc's ambassadors concluded that the crisis in the country was caused entirely by indigenous political and economic forces.<sup>546</sup> Furthermore, the Western powers made efforts to discredit the Soviet and the Socialist countries' efforts in Ethiopia. The US representatives openly proposed economic assistance in exchange for Addis Ababa's restraining measures against the Bloc. In an attempt to counter any American moves, Ratanov met Endelkachew on 17 May. The Moscow's emissary informed Ethiopia's Premier of the Kremlin's decision to provide his country with 4,000 tonnes of wheat and to expand the Soviet hospital in Addis Ababa at a cost of US\$ 1m.<sup>547</sup>

The KGB Resident in Addis Ababa knew well that the leftward swing in the army in late spring was monitored closely by the Western powers. Washington had strong positions within the Ethiopian security service, police, and army command, and was ready to launch active measures, if the situation in the country came to threaten the White House's stake.<sup>548</sup> The initial transformative stage, up until June 1974, was seen as fully

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<sup>545</sup> Cf. 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' NAČR, and Cipher no. 67, 29 June 1974, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., o. 6sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 2, l. 76.

<sup>546</sup> 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' 15-7.

<sup>547</sup> Cipher no. 61, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 6sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 1, l. 68.

<sup>548</sup> KGB Reference no. 241, 'O vnutripoliticheskom položzenii v Éfiopii,' 15 March 1974, AMVR, f.1, op.10, a.e. 2080, s. 2, l. 173.

consistent with the US' interests as Washington had previously pressured the Imperial Government to change their leadership-style and land ownership. However, the emergence of the radical wing in the military leadership, prompted Washington's emissaries to re-assess the impact of local developments and deem the political situation potentially dangerous to American standing in the country. The Bloc's joint assessment claimed that the US was trying to maintain its existing positions, while, in the case of further radicalisation of the military, Washington was ready to use its positions and actively support the right-wing forces.<sup>549</sup>

The West aimed to suffocate the radical transformations by harnessing the support of the Arab reaction, led by Saudi Arabia. The Arabs, following the February events, sought to support Haile Selassie's bid to stay in power. According to the KGB's information, in the spring the US was taking urgent measures to assist the Emperor's new government by offering economic aid. The US-brokered proposal by the Saudi King Faisal to provide US\$ 20m, thus, expressed Arab's disapproval of the army's radicalisation.<sup>550</sup>

According to Ambassador Ratanov, in the spring, the struggle between East and West for Ethiopia and the intensification of the positive elements in Addis Ababa's foreign policy were becoming more acute. As a result, the Ethiopian Government needed to be assisted by the expansion of bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. In Ratanov's view, Addis Ababa was becoming ready to deepen its relations with the East.<sup>551</sup> For that reason, he encouraged the diplomatic activity of the Socialist countries' missions as this was, for once, helpful in strengthening the new Ethiopian regime, and second, it further obliged Addis Ababa to repel the pressures coming from the West, attempting to hinder the growth of the Bloc's stake in Ethiopia.<sup>552</sup> The coalescence of the radical nucleus in

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<sup>549</sup> 'Vnitropolitická situace v Etiopii,' 15-7.

<sup>550</sup> KGB Reference no. 855, 2-3.

<sup>551</sup> Cipher no. 61, 19 June 1974, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 6sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 2, l. 68.

<sup>552</sup> Cipher no. 67, 29 June 1974, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 6sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 4, l. 76.

the army over the summer did not lead to straightforward gains for Moscow, as Addis Ababa tried to maintain its neutralist foreign policy. In addition, the US and its regional ally, Saudi Arabia, attempted to support Haile Selassie's standing and to suffocate the radical transformations.

#### IV. 4.3 The Derg takes the lead

Endelkachew's removal marked the gradual swing of power from the crown and the civilian cabinet to the military junta. After launching a vilification campaign against the Emperor and his Government, AFCC issued Proclamation No. 1 on the Ethiopian New Year, 12 September 1974, deposing the 'Lion of Judah.' The Committee, being certain that the Crown Prince would not accept its invitation to take the throne, immediately issued its Proclamation No. 2 on 13 September 1974 that enabled the military to assume a role as acting head of state, under the designation of a Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC).<sup>553</sup>

As for the Moscow representatives' assessment of the pivotal events of September goes, it was clear to them that the 1974 ousting of Haile Selassie, unlike the 1960 coup, was irreversible. It represented a 'progressive development,' requiring an immediate, positive reaction from Moscow.<sup>554</sup> On 18 September, Ratanov visited the new Ethiopian head of state, General Aman Andom. He passed on to him the congratulations of the Soviet leaders Podgorny and Kosygin and expressed wishes for democratic development of the country and deepening of the friendly ties between the two states. In reply, the General claimed that Ethiopia should not rely only on the West, and should

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<sup>553</sup> The Military council came to be widely known as 'Derg,' an Amharic noun for 'committee' or 'council' – same as the noun 'soviet' originally meant in Russia, as the British Ambassador Willie Morris observed. See 'The Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia,' 12 November 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1676, fo. 565.

<sup>554</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 204-5.

develop equal relations with all countries. He also stressed that the regime, leading the country towards democratic development, needed the Bloc's support, as there were certain difficulties with the conservative, as well as radical groups within the AFCC.<sup>555</sup> An outbreak of violence within the Derg in late November of 1974 and the deterioration of the situation in Eritrea put the Ethiopian revolution under enormous strain. This further alarmed Moscow's observers who became increasingly wary about the new leadership's prospects of survival.

#### IV. 4.3.1 The execution of General Aman Andom

The autumn of 1974 marked a crucial period in Ethiopia's political transformation. The emergence of an internecine struggle in the military ranks engendered wide international disapproval. The socialist state's envoys realised that the execution of the Derg's chairman General Aman in November was a logical step towards further strengthening the radical reforms. The most significant result from the November massacre, however, was the notable rise of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, who until then was largely unknown to the public. He quickly became one of the most influential members of the military junta. Moscow's diplomats and, eventually, the Kremlin gradually came to see him as a guarantor of Ethiopia's move to the left.

From 16 November 1974, during his addresses to the Ethiopian armed forces, Mengistu made himself a recognisable contender for the Derg's leadership. His addresses focused on explaining the Derg's achievements in preparing Ethiopian society for the transformation. Four days after Mengistu's first public appearance, the PMAC issued a statement on the dismissal of General Aman from the leadership.<sup>556</sup> In mid-November,

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<sup>555</sup> Cipher no. 92, 19 September 1974, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 6sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 3, l. 105.

<sup>556</sup> Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 138.

Aman resigned over the disagreement regarding the Eritrean question, to which he had sought a peaceful solution. A week later, Mengistu personally decided to arrest the Derg's fallen leader along with 22 young officers who had been opposing his ambitions for power. On 23 November, at Mengistu's order, an army unit was dispatched to arrest the General. In a shoot-out, a number of Aman's military supporters were killed, while he committed suicide in full uniform.<sup>557</sup>

Importantly, the Russians endorsed the Mengistu clique's version of General Aman's affinity with the 'feudal reaction.' Aman's faction was also alleged to have provided support to the CIA and the intelligence services of other Western powers. In addition, signs of 'flirting' between the General and the Eritrean secessionists were 'witnessed' during his visit to Asmara where he tried to persuade them to stop the fratricidal war. Apparently, many in the Derg, particularly among the Amhara ethnic group, feared that General Aman was seen as willing to make concessions to separatist organisations, which, in turn, could have served as a catalyst for fuelling secessionist sentiments in the Ogaden, in the east, and with the Oromo people, in the south. According to Sinitsyn, therefore, Aman's elimination and the summary execution, without a trial, of 58 old-regime detainees was not simply a 'pre-emptive' action, but an attempt to deprive the left wing's opposition of its support base, resembling in principle the actions taken by the Soviet authorities during the civil war in Russia after 1917.<sup>558</sup> In the eyes of Bloc's diplomats, through his actions, Aman hindered the process of radicalisation and eventually became an 'objective obstacle' to its successful development. His execution, therefore, followed the logic of the revolutionary process according to which non-cooperating political figures were to be eliminated.

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<sup>557</sup> Dawid Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears*, 21-2.

<sup>558</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 211-2.

Despite the fact that Aman's elimination followed certain revolutionary logic, it was symptomatic of the presence of serious issues within the military leadership. On the one hand, the cause for Aman's execution raised question about the unity of the armed forces, which Moscow's Bulgarian allies saw as being far from monolithic. On the other hand, General Aman's assassination underlined the military force's lack of wide social support.<sup>559</sup> The direct result, from the November massacre was the alienation of many Eritreans and the provision of a strong stimulus to the Eritrean separatists. It also contributed to the escalation of the conflict in Ethiopia's Red Sea province.<sup>560</sup> The domestic and the international standing of the Derg suffered significantly, as a result. While Moscow realised the revolutionary potential of the inexperienced military leadership, the Kremlin's envoys and their East-European colleagues recognised that the Derg's left wing, led by Mengistu, was surrounded by insurgents on the periphery and growing opposition in the capital.

#### IV. 4.3.2 PMAC's problems in the countryside

Moscow regarded the secessionist fronts on Ethiopia's periphery as extremely dangerous for the successful implementation of Addis Ababa's reforms and the Horn's stability as a whole. Soviet envoys in Mogadishu and Addis Ababa reportedly were instructed from Moscow that their main duty was to avert any conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, as it would favour Washington and the reactionary forces within Ethiopia. Similarly, Moscow recognised Eritrea's stability as vital for the success of the Ethiopia's transformations and peace in the Horn, in general.

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<sup>559</sup> T. Ribarov [Report on situation in Ethiopia in the second-half of 1974], 10 December 1974, DAMVnR RB, f. Ya., op. 31, d. 83, pr. 1298, s. 5, l. 46.

<sup>560</sup> Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 52.

In November 1974, violence and dissent began to replace peaceful change and national consensus. With the country's rapid economic decline, its military capacity began to diminish both due to shortages of weapons and persistent internal army divisions.<sup>561</sup> Importantly, the resumption of the Eritrean military campaign showed Addis Ababa's lack of a clear plan as to how to tackle the complex situation on the ground. The leaders of the Coordinating Committee, headed by Mengistu, espoused a tough policy and did not shy away from favouring the use of force in maintaining the status quo. The Administrative Council, PMAC, on the other hand, favoured a more conciliatory approach vowing for negotiations and eventually agreeing on providing Eritrea with special territorial status within Ethiopia.

The Russians perceived the Eritrean problem as the most urgent issue for the military regime at the beginning of 1975. Its solution could have sealed the fate of the military rule.<sup>562</sup> As early as February 1975, in the immediate aftermath of the Eritrean assault on Asmara, the Soviet press began noticing the deteriorating situation in the Red Sea province. It turned its attention to the problem for the first time in 25 years.<sup>563</sup> Simultaneously, the Soviet embassy was concerned that the beginning of the progressive transformation had negative repercussions in Eritrea. The separatists, dominated by 'bourgeois-nationalist elements,' became reactionary, and were focused on undermining the emerging progressive regime in Ethiopia. Worryingly, according to Moscow's observers, in their tactics, the Eritrean rebels appeared also to act in unison with nationalist-separatist movements in other parts of Ethiopia. Reportedly, the Eritreans were also seen as natural supporters to the Somalis in the Ogaden, as well. To the Russians, these contacts posed a serious threat to the integrity of the Ethiopian state, and,

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<sup>561</sup> C. Legum, *Ethiopia: the Fall of Haile Selassie's Empire* (London: Rex Collins, 1975), 2-3.

<sup>562</sup> T Ribarov [Information on the Eritrean Problem], 21 January 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 32, d. 69, pr. 1255, s. 8, l. 9.

<sup>563</sup> *Izvestiya*, 9 February 1975, cited in Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 243.

at the same time, facilitated the work of the Ethiopian 'internal reaction' against the Addis Ababa regime.<sup>564</sup>

Although, the Soviet Government considered the Eritrean problem internal and opposed any outside interference, it recommended to Addis Ababa that the issue be resolved peacefully.<sup>565</sup> The Soviet Union did not have any relations with the Eritrean liberation fronts and openly opposed the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia.<sup>566</sup> The insurgent movements on the edge of the former Ethiopian empire were deemed extremely dangerous for the successful implementation of Addis Ababa's reforms and the Horn's stability, as a whole. Realising this, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, reportedly instructed his envoys in Mogadishu and Addis Ababa that their main task was to prevent any conflict between the local states, as it would be in the interest of the United States and the reactionary forces within Ethiopia.<sup>567</sup> During a visit to Moscow, in May 1975, the Somali Vice-President, General Mohamed Ali Samatar, was criticised by Soviet officials for the agreement concluded between Siad and the ELF's representative, Osman Saleh Sabbe, that some Ethiopian tribes be encouraged to launch attacks against the new Ethiopian regime. The Russians then advised Samatar that Mogadishu should concentrate its efforts on overcoming the difficult economic situation in the country, instead of interfering in Ethiopia, where the new regime's standing was far from stable.<sup>568</sup> Moscow feared that if the situation in Eritrea deteriorated, the same would follow in the Ogaden.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> R. Egorov, 'Vypiska iz politpis'ma Posolstva 'O perspektivakh uregulirovaniya éritreiskoi problem̄y,' 8 August 1975, RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 487, ll. 4-5.

<sup>565</sup> Cipher no. 26, Tsankov to Zhivkov, 13 February 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7 sh., d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 2, l. 22.

<sup>566</sup> Information on consultations between Seventh Department of Bulgarian Foreign Ministry, and Second and Third Departments of the Soviet MFA, 31 May-6 June 1976, (hereafter, Consultations MVnR-MID), Moscow, DAMVnR RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 125, pr. 2550, s. 9, l. 173.

<sup>567</sup> Cable, Belgrade to Mogadishu, 19 September 1975, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Etiopija 1975, fasc. 30, dos. 16, sig. 444446, s. 195.

<sup>568</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade, no. 214, 19 June 1975, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Mala zemalja [...Somalija...] 1975, fasc. 223, dos. 5, sig. 431884, s. 1.

<sup>569</sup> Consultations MVnR-MID, s. 9, l. 173.

The Soviet Union, therefore, acknowledged that stability in Eritrea was a key factor for the success of Addis Ababa's transformations and peace in the Horn as a whole.

#### IV. 5. The ideological underpinning of the Derg

In 1975, the Derg's gradual drift towards Marxism-Leninism aimed to contain the plethora of left-wing parties and mass organisations, which had grown 'seemingly overnight.'<sup>570</sup> Initially, instead of accommodating ideological currents, the Derg waged a struggle against them in an attempt to preserve its position as undisputed power broker. This prompted Soviet and Bloc diplomats to notice that, in 1975, Ethiopia still lacked the conditions for a profound socialist revolution. A major turn in the Bloc's attitude towards the Ethiopian move to the left came with the adoption, on 20 April 1976, of the Programme for National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Importantly, to the Soviet observers, the programme marked a momentous development as it put forward a specific plan for the socialist transformation of Ethiopia's society.

##### IV. 5.1 The Ethiopia's socio-political transformation

In late 1974, the new regime clearly realised the need to adopt a unifying ideology by which to consolidate the tensions between the centre and periphery and tackle the vast underdevelopment of the country. The Derg's first key ideological pronouncement came on 20 December 1974, with the proclamation of Ethiopian Socialism,. Consequently, the Derg's nationalist motto 'Ityopia Tikdem'<sup>571</sup> gave place to Marxist slogans.<sup>572</sup> The next crucial step, however, in the regime's programme of socio-political transformation had a

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<sup>570</sup> Amare Tekle, 'The Determinants of the Foreign Policy of Revolutionary Ethiopia,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 27, no. 3, (1989): 495.

<sup>571</sup> Amharic for 'Ethiopia First.'

<sup>572</sup> Dawid, *Red Tears*, 24.

more pragmatic theme to it. On 4 March 1975, the Derg nationalised land and industry. In addition, the subsequent introduction of an education curriculum, based on socialist principles, attempted to narrow the differences between the Derg and the clandestine Marxist organisations, excluding the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. The latter consistently called upon the PMAC to hand over power to a 'provisional government' consisting of members of the intelligentsia, workers, peasants, students, and other progressive elements.<sup>573</sup>

Building upon the experience of the civilian organisation and attempting to gather their support, on 20 April 1976, the Derg announced the programme of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Moscow's observers, acknowledged that the NDR programme put forward a plan for the transformation of Ethiopian society, based on scientific socialism, thus, creating the prerequisites for the transformation of the national democratic revolution into a socialist one.<sup>574</sup> In the eyes of the socialist observers, the revolution began to discover itself and its ideology.<sup>575</sup> The proclamation marked the gains of the revolution and outlined the prospects for its further development. Moscow's commentators saw it as a necessary stage in of Ethiopia's transition to socialism, which sought to resolve the issues of economic development.<sup>576</sup> Thus, the anti-feudal revolution in Ethiopia evolved into national-democratic social-liberation.<sup>577</sup> According to Mengistu, the working class was set to be in the forefront of the social transformation, and the government was to form a vanguard party of the proletariat.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Teferra, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 167.

<sup>574</sup> V. Koval', et al, *Revolutsionnye dvizheniya i imperialisticheskaya kontrrevolyutsiya* (Moskva: Nauka, 1987), 117.

<sup>575</sup> Raúl Valdés Vivó, *Ethiopia's Revolution* (New York: International Publishers. 1978), 33, cited in John Makrakis, 'Garrison Socialism,' 7.

<sup>576</sup> Krylova, 'Natsional'no-demokraticheskaya revolyutsiya,' *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 1 (1989): 46.

<sup>577</sup> V. Yagya, *Éfiopiya v novejšee vremya* (Moskva: Mysl, 1978), 311.

<sup>578</sup> V. Korovikov, 'Nov' drevnei Éfiopii,' *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, no. 2 (1977), 123-5.

#### IV. 5.2 The Derg's struggle with the civilian left

Nevertheless, despite the regime's ideological pronouncements, according to Ambassador Ratanov and in spite of his mostly positive opinion on the Derg's reforms, in early 1975, he claimed that Ethiopia was not yet ripe for a true and deep socialist revolution.<sup>579</sup> Similarly, the Belgrade envoy, Vojinovic, who also enjoyed excellent relations with the military, remarked, following the November killings, that the conditions in Ethiopia were 'so primitive' that no real socialism could be established there 'for many years.'<sup>580</sup> The unpredictability, therefore, and the internecine quarrels between the PMAC, the AFCC, and the civilian political organisations further exacerbated the Soviet reluctance.<sup>581</sup> Notwithstanding the Derg's coherent attempts to embark on a profound course of socialist building, a myriad of internal conflicts and contradictions with the civilian left blemished the revolutionary process.

To Soviet observers, the tension within the Derg was a manifestation of an acute class struggle. Reactionary cliques within the military, therefore, were seen as associated 'with imperialist agents, preventing the establishment of close relations with the socialist countries.'<sup>582</sup> Additionally, in the autumn of 1976, the Derg accepted the Fidaist contention that the EPRP should be eliminated. Arrests followed. The EPRP's response was an unsuccessful attempt to kill Mengistu on 23 September. In addition, disagreement on how to deal with the EPRP led to another split within the Derg, which culminated in the elimination of the anti-Mengistu faction on 3 February 1977.<sup>583</sup> Importantly, the

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<sup>579</sup> 'Minutes of the meeting held at the Italian Embassy by the Ambassadors representing the EEC Countries,' 16 January 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1826, fo. 4.

<sup>580</sup> P. Wyman, 'Comments of Yugoslav Ambassador on Attitudes of EPMG,' 10 January 1975, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1975ADDIS00327 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

<sup>581</sup> D. Biggin, 'Opportunities for the Establishment of Communist Influence in Ethiopia,' 17 June 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1680, fo. 3; See also M. Rothenberg, *The USSR and Africa* (Miami: University of Miami, 1980), 34.

<sup>582</sup> V. Korovikov, *Éfiopiya – godŷ revolyutsii* (Moskva: Novosti, 1979), 100.

<sup>583</sup> Ottaway, 'Democracy and New Democracy,' 29.

Mengistu coup marked a significant milestone in Soviet-Ethiopian relations when he clearly emerged as undisputed leader of the Revolution. This local turn of events caused Moscow to reconsider its regional options and act decisively to preserve the progressive transformation of its newest African ally.

Nonetheless, the Kremlin realisation of the Derg's trustworthy Marxist credentials had to go through a series of stages during 1975-6. This demonstrated Moscow's need to be assured that it was dealing with a *bona fide* leftist regime, bent on embarking on Socialist building, and not merely with a nationalist movement, aiming to preserve its territorial unity and grip on power. Still, at the time, the Derg was not ready to sever relations with the US entirely, as it depended on Washington's military deliveries, which were crucial in continuing the campaign in Eritrea. Moreover, Addis Ababa, in an attempt to keep all options open for foreign military assistance, chose to obtain arms from Beijing, as well.

#### IV. 6. Derg's foreign policy options: between Washington and Beijing

The new regime's tenuous position during the latter half of 1974 and throughout 1975 further exacerbated its need for obtaining military material quickly and in great quantities. Initially, in line with its non-aligned position, Ethiopia attempted to seek arms from all available sources, including Washington, Beijing, and Moscow. Nevertheless, foreign players hesitated to respond favourably to the Derg's demands, owing to the unstable situation in the capital and the periphery. A great influx of arms was seen as an additional factor that would have aggravated Ethiopia's internal conditions. From the outset, it became clear to Moscow that the military was intent on 'shopping' for arms from all possible sources. Clearly, the Kremlin was not prepared to provide the necessary quantities to Addis Ababa at that point. Relations with Somalia, the precarious situation

in Ethiopia, the unclear future of the regime, and its orientation, inhibited Kremlin's generosity on the military field.

#### IV. 6.1 The gradual rift with Washington

The lack of certainty regarding the Derg's foreign arms sources and its simultaneous dealings with East and West engendered much speculation. In the late summer of 1974, Ethiopia began contemplating a reorientation of its foreign policy. The main reason behind that was the US unwillingness to provide Addis Ababa with sufficient levels of military assistance in order for it to withstand the Somali threat. This editorial piece was the first public airing in Ethiopia of the Regime's option to turn to China or the USSR for military assistance. Throughout 1974, as the military control over civilian government increased, and as the radical element amongst the armed forces had grown stronger, the possibility that the Regime would turn to the left also appeared greater.<sup>584</sup>

The Derg's fondness for denouncing capitalism was noticed in Washington but it was dismissed as crowd-pleasing rhetoric, at first. Determined to woo the new regime, the US chose to increase funding to levels Haile Selassie had 'only been able to fantasise about.'<sup>585</sup> In August 1974, at least several dozen M-60 tanks were delivered to Ethiopia. The tanks began arriving in Ethiopia about a month after the Podgorny visit to Somalia in early July, when he reportedly brought Siad a gift of 7 MiG-21s.<sup>586</sup> In the autumn, however, Ethiopia continued to press the American Government for additional military assistance. Despite the increased arms deliveries, the tensions between the US and

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<sup>584</sup> P. Wyman, 'Implications of Editorial Suggesting Reorienting Ethiopian Foreign Policy,' 26 August 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974ADDIS10053 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

<sup>585</sup> Henze, *Arming the Horn 1960-1980* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1982), cited in M. Wrong, *I Didn't do it For You* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2005), 269.

<sup>586</sup> 'Press Article on US Arms to Ethiopia,' 27 August 1974, NARA Online, RG59, DN: 1974STATE187947 [accessed on 11 December 2008].

Ethiopia continued, and the growing manifestation of anti-Americanism in Ethiopia tested Washington's patience.<sup>587</sup>

In early September, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister Zewde Gebre-Selassie told the British Ambassador that the only foreign policy on which the Derg had formed a strong opinion was that of arms supplies. In PMAC's opinion, for 25 years, the Americans had used Ethiopia 'as a dumping ground for obsolete material,' and left them in a decidedly inferior position vis-à-vis Somalia.<sup>588</sup> Accordingly, in the autumn, Aman informed Kissinger in writing that the Soviets had already offered arms to Addis Ababa, stressing that if the Americans were unable to accelerate their military assistance programme, the Ethiopians would 'shop' elsewhere. Influential figures in the State Department, however, downplayed the prospects for Moscow to become Addis Ababa's leading arms supplier. It appears that Washington's lack of willingness to provide additional material, at the time, was partly due to its belief that the Soviets could try to steer clear of importing arms to Ethiopia in a bid to 'avoid embarrassment for their relations with Somalia.'<sup>589</sup> In addition, Washington was unable to strengthen its position in Ethiopia, as bureaucratic constraints, imposed by Congress. The lack of will in the White House to engage decisively in their once most respected Sub-Saharan ally, reduced the US role to a mere preservation of diplomatic relations by providing token military supplies, mainly ammunition and spare parts.

For its part, however, Ethiopia was not yet ready to embark on a drastic change in its foreign orientation. In February 1975, the Derg's new leader, General Defer Banta, assured the British Ambassador that Addis Ababa was to remain strictly neutral and not

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<sup>587</sup> R. Barltrop, 'Arms Supplies to Ethiopia,' 22 January 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1851, fo. 1.

<sup>588</sup> Morris, 'Ethiopian Armed Forces,' 7 September 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1680, fo. 8.

<sup>589</sup> See Wendell Coote, cited in A. Reeve, 'Ethiopian Foreign Policy,' 22 October 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1679, fo. 11.

anti-Western.<sup>590</sup> Similarly, on 17 December, in conversation with a British diplomat, the former Prime-Minister Mikael Imru emphasised that the Ethiopians recognised the benefits of a continued relationship with the West, but this would not exclude developing contacts with the East and, of course, fraternal relationships with other developing countries.<sup>591</sup>

#### IV. 6.2 Ethiopian-PRC Relations

In the pursuit of its initial non-aligned foreign policy, therefore, the Derg did not rely only on the Americans. Continuing the Haile Selassie strategy of simultaneously entertaining different options, the Military Council attempted to enlist material support from Beijing, as well. While China had no intention of being involved in direct confrontation with Moscow over Ethiopia, the Russians saw the PRC's objectives in Ethiopia as directed at hindering the efforts of the socialist countries in their attempts to 'ease international tensions.' This aim also transpired in Addis Ababa where the PRC representatives attempted to explore the predisposition of the Ethiopian intelligentsia to Maoism, while discrediting the assistance provided by the Bloc. Chinese involvement in Ethiopia, however, provoked considerable suspicion on the part of the PMAC. Although most of its members were willing to accept Chinese assistance, especially in the military field, they appeared reluctant to succumb to Maoists ideas.

Ethiopian relations with the PRC began to expand from the beginning of the 1970s, when the Chinese attempted to expand and consolidate their presence in Ethiopia in a modest and unobtrusive manner.<sup>592</sup> Beijing concentrated its efforts on civilian tasks, mainly in the countryside, preferring to work secretly on the propaganda front.

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<sup>590</sup> 'First Meeting of HM Ambassador with Ato Kifle Wodajo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Friday 7 March 1975,' TNA, FCO 31/1826, fo. 34.

<sup>591</sup> D. Day, 'Record of Call on Lij Mikael Imru: 17 December,' 27 December 1975, TNA, FCO 31/1828, fo. 184.

<sup>592</sup> Cable, Belgrade to Peking, 23 December 1976, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Etiopija 1976, fasc. 34, dos. 17, sig. 467630, s. 1.

Chinese propaganda was chiefly focused on actively distributing literature in the countryside. In just the first half of 1975, more than 100,000 low cost and free copies of Chinese propaganda were imported and distributed in Ethiopia. In 1975, based in the provinces, the Chinese contingent was 300-strong, and was mainly engaged in infrastructural projects. In addition, the Bloc's intelligence suggested that PRC specialists also worked at the youth centres in the implementation of the land reform.<sup>593</sup>

A careful analysis shows that Beijing's Embassy had to correct some aspects in its tactics. From mid-1975, it became apparent that the PRC adopted a more shadowy strategy. It thus became clear that the Chinese diplomats sought to become embedded in the lower echelons of the society, as their relations with the military government failed to live up to Beijing's expectations.<sup>594</sup> The Derg's leadership became increasingly worried about the Chinese ideological penetration of Ethiopia's intellectuals and students.<sup>595</sup> As a result, the PMAC prohibited the free distribution of Maoist literature. According to the Derg's orders, circulation of Maoist literature was not permitted to exceed that of materials originating from the USSR and the other socialist countries. Additionally, in his speeches, the Chinese ambassador to Addis Ababa was prevented from making any statements that could be judged to be an attempt at weakening Ethiopian-Soviet relations.<sup>596</sup>

Although China was not looking for direct confrontation with Moscow in Ethiopia, and proceeded with care by maintaining an active, albeit low-key role, the Russians attributed certain sinister motives to Beijing's approach. In the KGB's analysis, the PRC's objectives in Africa aimed to hamper the efforts of the socialist countries in

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<sup>593</sup> 'Otnosno Kitaysko-Etiopskite otnosheniya,' passage no. 4, letter 23, 20 July 1975, ANRS, MVR-DS, f. 9, d. 2843, ch. I, s. 2, l. 217.

<sup>594</sup> T. Ribarov, 'Informatsiya otnosno sūstoyaniето na etiopsko-kitayskite otnosheniya pri noviya voenno-rezhim v Etiopiya,' 3 December 1975, DAMVnR-RB. f. Ya., op. 31, d. 82, pr. 1281, ss. 6-8; ll. 114-6 and ss. 11-2, ll. 119-20.

<sup>595</sup> Letter 23, ANRS, 2.

<sup>596</sup> 'Otnosno vūtrešno-politicheskoto polozhenie i vūnshnata politika na Etiopiya,' ANRS, MVR-DS, f. 9, d. 2843, ch. II, ss. 8-9, ll. 69-70.

their attempts to ‘ease international tensions.’ Beijing also paid increased attention to the continent, which it considered an essential part of the Third World. Thus, in the Soviet assessment, the Chinese actively aimed to include the African countries in a ‘broad united front’ against the ‘hegemony of the superpowers.’<sup>597</sup> This policy objective was also applied to Addis Ababa where the PRC representatives attempted to explore Ethiopian intelligentsia’s predilection towards Maoism. In addition, there were pro-PRC-oriented members of the AFCC with whom the Chinese diplomats sounded out Beijing’s pledge to provide much needed military and economic aid. While most of the AFCC’s members were reluctant to embrace Maoists ideas, they were willing to accept Chinese assistance, especially in the military field.

In addition, according to the Soviets, apart from Beijing’s success in quickly delivering impact economic aid, its envoys played an active role in discrediting the assistance provided by the socialist countries.<sup>598</sup> The Bloc’s assessment, and particularly that of SED CC and the *Auswärtiges Amt*<sup>599</sup> claimed that the process of radical transformations in Ethiopia had been developing extremely quickly and often not in line with the political situation in the country. The most telling example of this was the nationalisation and the land reform, which were seen as premature and, to a certain extent, extreme. In this regard, Berlin doubted whether the PMAC’s land reform was of their original thinking and suspected China’s hand behind it.<sup>600</sup>

While Beijing’s experience in Ethiopia seemed restrained, between February 1974 and February 1977, Addis Ababa’s relations with the Russians were equally complex. High-ranking Embassy officers, such as the Ambassador Ratanov, the Counsellor Sinitsyn, the First Secretaries Egorov, and Romashkin had the key task of translating the Derg’s

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<sup>597</sup> ‘O politika KNR v Afrike,’ 2.

<sup>598</sup> KGB Reference no. 1282, 10 September 1974, AMVR, f. 1, op 10, no. 2085, 1974, ss. 1-2, ll. 95-6.

<sup>599</sup> The GDR’s Foreign Ministry.

<sup>600</sup> Memcon, Ribarov - Kulbe, 30 May 1975, DAMvNR RB, f. Ya., op. 32, d. 69, pr. 1255, s. 2, l. 26.

needs into Kremlin's language. The information provided by the local representatives, therefore, played an important role as a conduit for first-hand views of local developments, obtained either through direct observation, or via Moscow's Bloc allies. Accordingly, the information from the local representatives and their pro-active steps proved to be instrumental in informing Moscow's flexible approach. The road to obtaining full Soviet support, however, probably took longer than the Ethiopian military had expected; to them, the need for Soviet aid was urgent, while for the Kremlin, until early 1977, providing the Derg with what it wanted was nothing more than a long-term plan.

#### IV. 7. The Deepening of Soviet-Ethiopian ties

The development of Soviet-Ethiopian relations throughout 1975 and 1976 provide a clear insight into the interplay between Moscow's central and local priorities. Although the metropole favoured local stability as a low-risk tool of embedding presence at minimal cost, the Derg's increasingly deteriorating situation required immediate reaction from the Kremlin's leaders. Consequently, in line with its traditionally cautious approach in the Horn, Moscow began gradually to widen its relations with Ethiopia's regime following the lack of favourable reaction to Ethiopia's requests for military assistance by the Americans and the Chinese. Although Addis Ababa sought urgent deliveries of military material, Moscow was not ready to oblige. Instead, the Kremlin and its allies opted for extending political support, which was instrumental in strengthening the leftist sentiments, displayed by the most of the Derg members, and in training.

The Soviet diplomats played an important role in dampening the Derg's sense of urgency in its dealing with Moscow. Ambassador Ratanov's frequent consultations with the Derg helped direct Addis Ababa's pressing needs toward the Moscow leadership, translating them in terms understandable to the Kremlin. He also skilfully presented the

Ethiopian leadership with the requirements sought by the Kremlin. Despite the reception of Ethiopian cadres for training in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Moscow and its allies were not as active in the economic field as the Ethiopians would have wanted. It seems that initially the Kremlin did not object to Washington's role in this aspect. The Soviet observers noted that, due to Addis Ababa longstanding ties with Washington, it needed time to adapt its economy and military system to the East. Making Ethiopia reject the modest military support offered by America was seen as an unwise move, which would have confronted the Soviet leadership with the urgent need to deliver vast amounts of arms fast; something it was not ready to provide at that point.

#### IV. 7.1 The Derg turns to the left

In early 1975 Moscow acknowledged that Addis Ababa's new regime was unstable and lacked clarity regarding its future orientation. Although, Ethiopia appeared willing to reduce its military dependence on Washington, it was unable to embark on a complete switchover of its military suppliers. Nevertheless, in political terms, relations between Addis Ababa and Moscow began to make significant progress, manifested in an increased number of training activities and delegations, but this did not lead to an immediate increase in military support for the Ethiopian regime. In Moscow's point of view, the simultaneous promotion of cultural, propaganda, and ideological activities was a stepping stone which would lead to the launch of a comprehensive programme of military assistance.

Following the Derg's heightened interest, starting from late 1974 onwards, after an initial period of cautious exploration, the Soviets began taking practical measures to increase their political support for the new Ethiopian regime. In early February, on Ethiopia's initiative, a meeting between the Ratanov and Derg's executives: Teferi,

Mengistu, Atenafu, and Sisay took place. The Ethiopian leaders stressed that they were in favour of ‘independent anti-imperialist and anti-colonial policy’ but also committed to maintaining active relations with all friendly countries. They also shared with Ratanov that they sought active cooperation with the socialist states, as well. Moscow’s emissary observed that the military regime had no clear idea of what the paths and the forms of cooperation between Ethiopia and the socialist countries should be. In addition, Ratanov considered that the Bloc should help stabilise the military regime and enhance its prospects for successfully completing the progressive transformations.<sup>601</sup>

On 11 February 1975, Ratanov met Teferi, Mengistu, Atenafu, and Sisay again, and discussed the situation in the country and the relations between the two states. Ratanov noted that the Kremlin kept a close eye on Ethiopia’s progressive transformation, and looked favourably at Addis Ababa’s willingness to lead a non-aligned foreign policy. Moscow, was, at same time, ready to work on improving the political, cultural, and other relations between the two states, as well as, receiving high-level Ethiopian delegation. The Derg, however, had to make concrete proposals in accordance with the country’s needs. In Ratanov’s views, Ethiopia still appeared dependent on the West and unable to break ties with Washington. While the Regime aimed to widen its contacts with the Socialist states, it lacked the readiness to launch serious negotiations on the extension of the co-operation with them.<sup>602</sup> Nevertheless, Ratanov’s meeting with the Derg’s leaders in February 1975 was crucial in signalling the Kremlin’s readiness to embark on a course of political cooperation with the military regime. Generally, it demonstrated that the Kremlin’s careful policy responses to local opportunities were subject to thorough assessment and analysis. It could be argued that Moscow did not see the process of the establishment of bilateral

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<sup>601</sup> Cipher no. 23, 6 February 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 3, l. 19.

<sup>602</sup> Cipher no. 26, Tsankov to Zhivkov re. Memcon, Ratanov-Bante, Mengistu, Abate, and Habte on 11 February 1975, 13 February 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7 sh., d. 10, a.e. 33, ss. 1-2, ll. 21-2.

relations as one-directional, and required considerable effort from the local party in finding common interest.

Part of the Soviets' reluctance to become deeply involved in Addis Ababa was owed to Moscow's assessment of the regime's future prospects. In early 1975, while clearly in favour of the revolutionary transformations in Ethiopia, the Russians saw the new Regime as unstable and lacking clarity regarding the further steps it should take for the consolidation of the Revolution.<sup>603</sup> On the other hand, the Kremlin recognised the potential of the planned transformation of Ethiopian society and the need to support it. For that reason, Moscow did not shy away from showing its interest and willingness to embark on a long-term course of deepening relations by providing token assistance in the field of education and political co-operation. Nevertheless, the support that mattered most for the Ethiopian leaders – the military – was still awaiting the Kremlin's approval.

#### IV. 7.2 Ethiopia seeks Kremlin's military support

Just a week after Ratanov's meeting with the Derg's leaders, the Ethiopian military prepared a concrete proposal for a seven-member official delegation, led by the chief of the PMAC's political department, Sisay Habte. It aimed to establish contacts with the Soviet Bloc party and state leaders through which to discuss 'in principle' questions of future development of the relationship, paving the way for political, economic, cultural, and, eventually, military co-operation. The composition of the delegation was kept secret, and no formal publications on the visits to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Czechoslovakia were printed.<sup>604</sup> In April, a month after the return of the delegation, the Prague's Ambassador shared with his Bloc colleagues that the Derg's Deputy Foreign

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<sup>603</sup> Cf. 'East Africa: Outside Influence and Potential Conflict,' Interagency Memorandum DCI/NIO 1076-75, 7 May 1975, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79R01142A0005 00070002-5.

<sup>604</sup> Cipher no. 30, 22 February 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, ss. 1-2, ll. 25-6.

Minister, Moltotal, had expressed the Government's readiness to steer Ethiopia's development to the left. Moltotal also expressed the military leadership's willingness to develop the country on the path of Scientific Socialism, claiming that the talk about 'Ethiopian-style' of socialism would be abandoned.<sup>605</sup>

Although, in political terms, relations between Addis Ababa and Moscow began to make significant progress, this did not lead to an immediate increase in military support for the Ethiopian regime. To the PMAC the most sought after support was military, which it needed urgently. In April 1975, an Ethiopian delegation left for Moscow, where it presented the Ethiopian leadership's suggestions for military cooperation. The Ethiopians appeared willing to reduce their military dependence on Washington and made a request for modest military support. The Ethiopian delegation, however, made it clear that a complete volte-face in the army was a long-term prospect; yet, the principal task in the immediate future was to avoid depleting the stockpiles of weaponry. The Addis Ababa military rulers proposed a co-existence of military systems. In other words, the Derg sought short-term use of both Soviet and American military aid. Nevertheless, after this initial approach to Moscow, which the Ethiopians characterised as a step forward in their relations with the Kremlin, military aid was not immediately forthcoming.<sup>606</sup>

It seems rather simplistic to separate the different forms of co-operation that constituted the basis for the development of friendly relations with a state, supposedly embarking on a programme of socialist orientation. The simultaneous promotion of cultural, propaganda, and ideological activities, in addition to the frequent exchange of

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<sup>605</sup> Memcon, Tsankov-Ratanov, 15 April 1975, DAMvNR RB, f. Ya., op. 31, d. 82, pr. 1280, s. 2, l. 44.

<sup>606</sup> Ratanov to MO, 9 April 1975, RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 1989, ll. 123-26; 167-73; cited in Westad, *Global Cold War*, 265-6. The most comprehensive account on Ethiopian-Soviet relations, spanning the period between 1974 and 1976 is offered by Westad in his *Global Cold War*. His description of the events, drawn upon extensive use of now reclassified and unavailable elsewhere archival material from Soviet archives, provides with an invaluable account on the period. Therefore, this section seeks to utilise some of Westad's documentary evidence, but it incorporates a rather broader framework, including Western and East-European materials.

delegations that gathered momentum from 1975 onwards underline the importance given by Moscow to the forging of wide-ranging ties with leftist regimes. On 15 July 1975, in his conversation with Teferi, Ratanov stressed that Moscow acknowledged the need for additional Soviet-Ethiopian military cooperation, but he suggested that the excessive levels of military support, requested by the military regime could only be expected after a considerable period of a deepening mutual relationship, sometimes requiring fifteen-years or more.<sup>607</sup> The Soviet Union, therefore, saw high levels of military assistance as subject to meeting certain criteria, including making progress in the political, economic, and cultural fields.

#### IV. 7.3 Soviet Bloc trains Addis Ababa in Socialist Building

The development of political and cultural relations played an important role in Moscow's local calculations. Addis Ababa's willingness to exchange delegations and open its media outlets to Eastern propaganda came to persuade the Kremlin's leaders of the PMAC's sincere intentions of embarking on socialist building, and, as a result, intense diplomatic activity followed. In this respect, Moscow's East-European allies proved essential by receiving and training Ethiopia's cadres. The Kremlin's European allies showcased the results of the vast socialist transformations, implying the practical benefits of belonging to the Socialist commonwealth.

Throughout, Mengistu's left-wing faction in the Derg aimed to use its links with Moscow in order to obtain political assistance. This strategy was based on the radicals' wish to learn from the Soviet experience in socialist building. Starting with his first meeting with Ratanov, Mengistu professed interest in sending young Ethiopians to

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<sup>607</sup> Memcon, Ratanov-Teferi Bante, 15 July 1975. RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 1989, l. 204; cited in Westad, *Global Cold War*, 266.

Moscow for ideological and political training.<sup>608</sup> Accordingly, the Derg's NDR programme signalled to Ratanov that Ethiopia's new socio-political course represented a pledge of loyalty to Soviet ideas and experience. In contrast to *Ityopia Tikdem*, it lacked any reference to indigenous forms of socialist transformation.<sup>609</sup> The Derg also continued to engage in consultations with the Soviet Embassy<sup>610</sup> on various issues and increased their demands for Marxist literature. The wide interest in Marxist writings led to a distribution of about 30,000 volumes by the Soviet Embassy in 1975 alone at the request of various Ministries, government agencies, schools, and universities.<sup>611</sup> Later, Soviet lecturers started to appear at Addis Ababa University, mostly to teach newly launched courses in Marxist-Leninist ideology. There was still no clear indication, however, that the Russians were ready to make a serious commitment to the Addis Ababa Regime.<sup>612</sup>

An important part in the development of Ethiopian-Soviet ties during 1975-76 became the training of Ethiopian political cadres in the Soviet Union and its European allies, preparing them for the formation of the vanguard party. Following Ethiopia's proposals, twenty trusted people from the army were received in Moscow on training for six months in early 1975. The Bloc's diplomats acknowledged with satisfaction that the Ethiopian leaders gave priority to the study of Soviet experience over that of China,<sup>613</sup> and, in 1975, the number of Ethiopian students in the Soviet Union increased to 350. Both Moscow and Addis Ababa were satisfied with the progress of the training process for the study of CPSU's experience in the creation of the vanguard party.<sup>614</sup> As a result, in July, an additional group of 40 military cadres was sent to the Soviet capital, for a six-

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<sup>608</sup> Memcon, Ratanov-Mengistu, 21 February 1975, RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 1989, l. 57, cited in Westad, *Global Cold War*, 269.

<sup>609</sup> See E. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 197 and Westad, *Op. cit.*, 269.

<sup>610</sup> Cipher no. 40, 27 March 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 1, l. 37.

<sup>611</sup> TASS, 'Interes k Sovetskoj literature,' 11 December 1975, GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 16486, l. 36.

<sup>612</sup> Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence*, 106.

<sup>613</sup> Cipher no. 40, DAMVnR-RB, l.

<sup>614</sup> Consultations MVnR-MID, s. 10, l. 174; Cf. Cipher no. 68, 3 July 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d.10, a.e. 33, s. 1, l. 64.

month course, for the study of theoretical and practical issues of socialist building.<sup>615</sup> Ethiopian cadres were also sent to various East-European capitals, with KSCĚ, for example, accepting 35 people for training in Prague.<sup>616</sup>

Another notable aspect, which received particular attention from the Bloc, was the Derg's work in the propaganda field. Press attachés of the Socialist states in Addis Ababa praised the PMAC's control of the mass media. Almost without exception, the Derg's new appointments in the mass media were progressively oriented, which allowed for more successful penetration of Socialist propaganda.<sup>617</sup> Understandably, Moscow and its allies were interested in providing additional training in this field. They recognised the importance of creating a favourable image for those who were responsible for the information policy of the Military Government. In April 1976, a delegation of representatives of the Ethiopian media visited the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. Upon its return to Addis Ababa, the leader of the group, the Chairman of the PMAC's Information and Public Relations Committee, Lt. Col. Asrat Desta, claimed that the delegations 'learned many important things' from the Bloc state's experience in socialist building, which could be useful for Ethiopia.<sup>618</sup>

An overlooked, albeit noteworthy, aspect of Ethiopia's relations with the Soviet Union, concerned the changing role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. A prominent role here was played by a group of Ethiopian priests, who were trained in the theological academies in the Soviet Union.<sup>619</sup> The Soviet Embassy also believed that the leadership of the Ethiopian Church was willing to cooperate with progressive forces in the country

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<sup>615</sup> CIPHER, no. 70, 9 July 1975, DA MVnR, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 1, l. 65.

<sup>616</sup> CIPHER no. 79, 23 July 1975, DAMVnR-RB, f. Sh., op. 7sh, d. 10, a.e. 33, s. 1, l. 75.

<sup>617</sup> Memcon, Ribarov - Kulbe, 30 May 1975, DAMvNR, ss. 2-3, ll. 26-7.

<sup>618</sup> M. Bocharnikov, 'Nekotorġe rezul'tatġ vizita v SSSR i ryad drugikh sots. stran delegatsii predstavitelei ėfiopskikh sredstv massovoġ informatsii,' 24 April 1976, RGANI, f. 5, op. 69, d. 485, l. 1.

<sup>619</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 223ff.

for the transformation of Ethiopian society.<sup>620</sup> In November 1975, a delegation from the Russian Orthodox Church, headed by Antonii, Metropolitan of Minsk, visited Addis Ababa and was accepted by Teferi. The meeting aimed to show that the Derg had the political support not only of the Soviet Government, but also of the Russian Church. This seemed an important contribution not only for the strengthening of the ties between the two churches, but also for the widening of the universal ties between the two countries.<sup>621</sup>

#### IV. 7.4 Economic relations

While the Ethiopian-Bloc exchange on a political level in 1975-76 progressed at a considerable rate, it was notable that the economic relations between them lagged behind. In mid-1976, soon after the proclamation of the NDR programme, according to the Soviet's MFA Ethiopia looked as a promising partner.<sup>622</sup> In July, the head of PMAC's economic committee, Capitan Moges Wolde Mikael, embarked on a visit to Moscow where he held meetings with the Soviet Premier, Kosygin, the Foreign Minister, Gromyko, and the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Boris Ponomarev. The parties concluded that 'a group of Soviet experts' should go to Ethiopia to study 'the lines of mutually beneficial economic and technical co-operation.'<sup>623</sup>

However, as the Kremlin was pleased with Ethiopia's move to the left, in the CIA's assessment, Moscow appeared eager to maximise its influence over the military power broker in Addis Ababa by giving the Moges delegation the red carpet treatment.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> R. Egorov, 'O nekotorykh novykh momentakh v polozhenii éfiopskoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi,' 4 August 1975, RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 379, ll. 18-9.

<sup>621</sup> G. Gumenyuk, 'O vizite delegatsii russkoï pravoslavnoi tserkvi v Éfiopiyu,' 7 December 1975, RGANI, f. 5, op. 68, d. 379, ll. 20, 23-4; cf. A. Ratanov, 'Zapis' besedy sotrudnikom Éfiopskoi patriarshii, svyashchenikom Solomonoi Selassie,' 31 May 1976, RGANI, f. 5, op. 59, d. 485, ll. 3-4.

<sup>622</sup> Consultations MVnR-MID, 10.

<sup>623</sup> Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence*, 106, Cf. Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 191.

<sup>624</sup> N[atational] I[n]telligence] D[aily] C[able], 15 July 1976; NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79 T00975A029100010024-2.

Although, the official purpose of Moges' trip to the Soviet Union was not announced, upon his return to Addis Ababa, the Capitan declared that his delegation had obtained a Soviet pledge of future aid on the premise that 'Ethiopia finds in the USSR the necessary support in the progressive transformation of its society.'<sup>625</sup> Moges remained well satisfied with the result of his visit and praised highly the talks held in Moscow and the attention given to them from the Soviet leaders.<sup>626</sup>

The initial period in the deepening of Soviet-Ethiopian relations, following the early-1974 unrest, culminated in a flurry of diplomatic activity in the latter half of 1975 and throughout 1976. The increased exchange of economic, political, cultural, and religious delegations between Addis Ababa and Moscow, Prague, Berlin, Bucharest, and Sofia became frequent. In the opinion of Belgrade's emissaries, the continuous exchange of delegations was mostly of a formal character, a view shared by other Bloc's representatives. While Ethiopia expected increased levels of assistance from the Socialist countries, they seemed less enthusiastic. Moscow was more inclined towards furnishing Addis Ababa with technical and expert assistance in order to facilitate the Ethiopia's socialist transformations.

Towards the end of 1976 the future development of Soviet and Bloc positions in Ethiopia became dependent on adjusting to the Derg's rising aspirations. The necessity to preserve previously acquired position became even more acute, due to the West's readiness to provide assistance and loans.<sup>627</sup> Whilst in the first year of the Revolution the West limited its economic relations with the country, in 1976, Washington attempted to

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<sup>625</sup> Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 191.

<sup>626</sup> Information on Moges' visit, 15 July 1976, DAMVnR RB, f. Ya., op. 32, d. 69, pr. 1258, s. 2, l. 3.

<sup>627</sup> Cable, Belgrade to Peking, 23 December 1976, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Etiopija 1976, fasc. 34, dos. 17, sig. 467630, s. 1-2.

increase its economic ties with Addis Ababa, and continued to provide supplies to the Ethiopian military.<sup>628</sup>

#### IV. 8. Conclusion

A closer examination of Ethiopian-Soviet relations between February 1974 and December 1976, reveals that the Kremlin displayed a markedly risk-averse attitude. It carefully observed the local situation and steered away from becoming directly involved in Ethiopia, owing to the regime's unclear future prospects for survival. In addition, the American presence in the country, and Moscow's stake in Somalia provided an additional motivation for the Kremlin's circumspect position. Finally, the Soviets' cautious diplomacy was assumed to be driven by the lower priority Moscow had given to Africa following the failure of Marxist-Leninist theories' applicability within the continent.<sup>629</sup>

Gradually, Moscow's reluctance to recognise the possibility for deep socialist revolution were replaced by the belief that Addis Ababa's military regime was indeed on a genuine path of progressive transformations. However, disappointingly for the Derg, this was not followed by an increase in the Bloc's military and economic aid. Paradoxically, the West continued to provide modest quantities of military material. Additionally, internal divisions and civil strife within Ethiopia's ruling circles provided an additional impetus that further motivated the Soviet Union to act with urgency in saving its newest African ally. When Mengistu emerged from the shadows as the man behind the Derg's turn to the left, following the February coup, he became Moscow's official contact in Addis Ababa. Despite this, the Kremlin was still to face further complications concerning its stake in Mogadishu. In addition, it had to deal with the reaction of its global competitor – the

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<sup>628</sup> 'Otnosheniyata na NR Bŭlgariya s razvivashtite se strani ot Tropicheska Afrika,' 13 May 1976, DAMvNR RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 125, pr. 2550, s. 10, l. 117.

<sup>629</sup> D. Biggin, 'Opportunities for the establishment of communist influence in Ethiopia,' 17 June 1974, TNA, FCO 31/1680, fo. 3.

United States. All this ended in a remarkable switch of allies leading to all-out support for Mengistu's regime against Siad Barre's aggression which had been launched against the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in the summer of 1977.

## Chapter Five

### **From the power of diplomacy to the diplomacy of power:**

February – November 1977

#### V. 1. Introduction

The period between Mengistu's coup and the beginning of the Soviet military re-supply mission in 1977, launched in favour of Ethiopia against the Somali aggressor, clearly demonstrates the interplay between the local developments and the regional, as well as international dimensions in Moscow's policy thinking. The level of involvement of Moscow's envoys in both Ethiopia and Somalia increased significantly as they came to play a crucial role in recognising the revolutionary zeal of the left-wing faction within the Derg, led by Mengistu, conveying, at the same time, their disappointment in Siad's policies. Key players on the ground, such as the Socialist states' diplomatic representatives, the local leaders, and other international participants, including Washington, and Cuba's leader, played an important role in motivating the Kremlin's decision to undertake a remarkable switch of alliances. Arguably, one critical event that contributed to a change in the Kremlin's attitudes towards Ethiopia at the expense of Somalia took place during Fidel Castro's shuttle diplomacy in March 1977. As a result, Castro's negative stance towards Siad confirmed Moscow envoys' observations. Mengistu's arrival and Castro's entry were pivotal in modifying America's local position by catalysing its attempt to distance itself from Addis Ababa, and by encouraging Mogadishu to diminish its dependence on the Bloc. Mengistu, however, acted immediately by reducing the Washington's stake to a minimum.

While the Kremlin's leaders appeared impressed by Mengistu's resolve and the extent of revolutionary dedication, they decided to continue with attempts to pacify the belligerent parties. Once again, similarly to the mid-1960s, Moscow engaged in triangular diplomacy, attempting, after initial hesitation in the spring, to mediate in the Somali-Ethiopian dispute over the summer. Thus, the Russians tried for as long as possible not to take any side in the conflict between the two states. Yet, convinced of the Carter Administration's support and buoyed by Arab promises of military aid, Siad abandoned a course of negotiation, sponsored by the USSR, and at the end of July, Somali guerrilla forces, covertly backed by Mogadishu, launched a massive attack on the Ethiopian Ogaden region. In the eyes' of the Kremlin's prominent ideologues, such as Ponomarev and Suslov, Siad's actions ran counter to the Leninist theory on the national question. More importantly, however, the Soviet leadership chose to harden its criticism towards Siad, who led Somalia on a collision course with fellow progressive Ethiopia. In this way, Siad was perceived as an instrument in the arms of international counter-revolutionary forces led by the West and its local allies – the reactionary Arab regimes, headed by Saudi Arabia.

As a result, in September, while halting the deliveries of offensive arms to Mogadishu, the Kremlin simultaneously increased the supplies of defensive equipment to Addis Ababa. Siad's stubbornness and Mengistu's continuous pleas for help, culminating with the latter's visit to Moscow in late October, caused the Russians' change of heart. Seeing that he had ultimately lost Soviet favour, in mid-November, Siad denounced the 1974 friendship treaty and ordered all Soviet military advisors to leave the country. This action required Moscow's immediate response. By then, Moscow's East-European and Cuban allies were convinced of Mengistu's true revolutionary potential, therefore, realising the genuine need to preserve Ethiopia's Socialist movement. As a result, the

Cominternist approach permeated the Narkomindel line in Moscow's foreign policy. In MFA's assessment, if Mengistu managed to remain in power, Ethiopia's development would maintain its correct progressive position.<sup>630</sup> Thus, in November, the Kremlin embarked on an extensive resupply mission to Ethiopia. It involved, apart from the delivery of a wide array of military material, the transportation of a vast number of Cuban troops. As a result, it repelled the Somali aggressor and saved Mengistu's hold on power.

## V. 2. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam assumes the Derg's leadership

The struggle between Mengistu and his opponents in the latter half of 1976 was seen by the Soviet Union's diplomats as an intensified battle between the revolution and the forces of reaction. In late September, an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Mengistu prompted him and his closest associates to embark on an attempt to enlist the Bloc's military support in launching an urgent offensive to preserve the ground gained by the reformist movement in the previous two years. Towards the end of 1976, the Soviet Bloc representatives, briefed by Mengistu, relayed his pleas to the central committees of the Parties, thus, paving the way to the long awaited military support. Mengistu's pre-emptive coup against his opponents, who were depicted as pro-Western, was the pivotal moment that prompted Moscow to increase its material support for Addis Ababa in defence of the revolution.

### V. 2.1 Mengistu's coup

On 23 September, Mengistu suffered an attempt on his life. According to the Derg's radical group, the enemies of the revolution became well organised and prepared for new acts of terror and sabotage. Workers and peasants, the mainstay of the transformation,

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<sup>630</sup> A. Karlov, 'Otnosno sreshtata na dr. Petar Mladenov s Ustinov V. A.,' 24 November 1977, DAMvNR RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 125, pr. 2555, s. 2, l. 68.

lacked organisational capacity and proved unable to restrain the counter-revolution. In addition, the army had to withstand attacks from the international, as well as and internal forces of reaction. In response to these pressures, in early October, Mengistu, summoned Soviet Bloc representatives and made an urgent request for the Bloc's military support for the revolutionary transformations.<sup>631</sup> In the Bloc's assessment, the PMAC's radical wing began to understand that socialism could not be built with Western assistance and American weapons and probed the Bloc's readiness to provide comprehensive co-operation with Ethiopia.<sup>632</sup>

Later, on 11 October, for the first time since the beginning of the revolution, on its own initiative, PMAC called for a consultation with the ambassadors of the European Socialist countries and asked for the weapons to be supplied in order to protect the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>633</sup> The Ethiopian request combined ideological and pragmatic considerations. The diminishing American interest and the urgent need for replenishing military stockpiles coincided with the need to find a unifying ideology with which to cement the military's hold on power and give a sense of direction for the implemented reforms. Consequently, Bloc ambassadors concluded that the Socialist states should respond favourably, providing requested military material in defence of the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>634</sup>

On 3 February, a shoot-out initiated by Mengistu, occurred at the Grand Palace. General Teferi Bante, appointed Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces following the 29 December reorganisation within the Derg, along with another six prominent Derg members were executed for their alleged attempt to organise an anti-revolutionary coup. On 4 February, hundreds of thousands of Addis Ababa residents gathered in the

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<sup>631</sup> Memo, Tsankov to Mladenov, TsDA, 18 October 1976, f.1, op.64, a.e. no. 492, 5-BP, ss. 19-20.

<sup>632</sup> Letter, Stanishev to Velchev, 25 October 1976, TsDA, f.1, op.64, a.e. no. 492, 5-BP, ss. 14-5.

<sup>633</sup> Tsankov to Mladenov, TsDA, 25.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Revolution Square to express their support for the drastic measures taken against the traitors and defeatists. Additionally, Mengistu also announced that, in the future, he would seek its military aid from the socialist countries. On 11 February, Mengistu was elected Chairman of PMAC and issued a new law, defining the rights and duties of the highest authority in the country.<sup>635</sup> This gave Mengistu the unlimited powers he sought.

Mengistu's immediate step after claiming power was to improve the country's security situation, which was severely weakened by the rural unrest incited by the Eritrean liberation front, the opposition in the guise of the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). This required a rapid increase in military supplies and, as the West was gradually distancing itself from the regime, the East remained a viable option for the provision of such supplies. On 8 February, during a conversation in the Soviet Embassy the Cuban ambassador, Jose Peres Novoa, informed his Soviet colleague that he had visited Mengistu, who had requested from the Cuban leader the provision of small arms to the rural based Ethiopian People's Militia, which was created in 1975 to 'safeguard the revolution.' To strengthen his plea for support, Mengistu shared that the PMAC expected the US, following 3 February, to introduce even tougher sanctions against Ethiopia, while providing military assistance to Sudan and Kenya, and pitting officials of surrounding countries against the Ethiopian regime.<sup>636</sup>

Moscow, then, attempted to gauge the regime's resolve to seek Bloc's assistance and requested a fact-finding communication between a Bulgarian physician, acting as secret operative for the Bulgarian KDS Residence in Ethiopia, and the third ranking person in the Derg, Major Birhanu Bayeh. According to the latter, Ethiopia's territorial integrity was in jeopardy and the regime was not in a position to ignore the military aid

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<sup>635</sup> See V. Korovikov, *Éfiopiya – gody revolyutsii* (Moskva: Novosti, 1979), 107ff; C. Legum, 'Angola and the Horn of Africa' in *Diplomacy of Power*, ed. S. Kaplan (Washington: Brookings, 1981), 614-5.

<sup>636</sup> Memcon, Ratanov-Novoa, 10 February 1977, Ts[entr] Kh[raneniya] S[ovremennoi] D[okumentatsii], f. 5, op. 73, d. 1637, l. 85 in C[old] W[ar] I[n]ternational H[istory] P[roject] B[ulletin], no. 8-9 (1996/7), 53.

that China offered to the country. He also added that the PMAC was ready to accept aid from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.<sup>637</sup>

## V. 2.2 Soviet reactions towards the coup's outcome

The turbulent events in early February further strengthened the impression on the part of the Socialist states' envoys that their respective governments would need to step up their support for the preservation of the Ethiopian Revolution. Moreover, to Moscow's representatives it appeared that, owing to Somalia's territorial ambitions, the interests of the Arab states in Eritrea's rebellion, and the US presence in the country, Ethiopia was a focal point of the most pressing regional and international issues. Consequently, an eventual triumph of counter-revolutionary forces, would significantly harm Moscow's interests. Moscow's local calculations mixed ideological with realpolitik thinking, as the strengthening of the Ethiopian Revolution was thought to advance Moscow's position in the area at the expense of America and its regional allies.'

The February coup was perceived by Moscow's observers as a disruption of 'the most dangerous conspiracy against the revolutionary course of the country.' On 4 February, Mengistu received the Soviet Ambassador, Ratanov, who strongly condemned the 'attempted coup against the Ethiopian revolution,' and expressed satisfaction with the measures taken by members of the armed forces against the counter-revolutionaries. Moreover, Ratanov expressed his belief that the relations between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia were growing stronger, and that both countries would maintain contacts not only through regular diplomatic channels, but also through adherence to shared principles

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<sup>637</sup> 'Otnosno etiopsko-kitaiskite otnosheniya,' 10 February 1977, reference note 1137, ANRS, f. 9, d. 2843, ch. II, s. 1, l. 29, and 'Otnosno polozhenieto v stranata,' reference note 1136, 10 February 1977, ANRS, f.9, d. 2843, ch. II, s. 1, l. 32.

based on socialist ideology.<sup>638</sup> In Moscow, however, Lev Mironov, the desk officer responsible for Ethiopia and Somalia in the MFA's Third African Department, gave his British colleague implicit expression of the Department's cautious assessment by showing a genuine lack of certainty about the results of the coup. He, reportedly, hedged his bets even for the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA).<sup>639</sup> When the situation became clearer to Moscow, the Soviet press voiced its implicit support of Mengistu, both by publishing the official announcement of the execution of 'the counter-revolutionaries,' and by reporting the mass rallies in Mengistu's favour.<sup>640</sup>

After Mengistu's coup, Soviet diplomats felt that the political environment in Ethiopia had changed drastically. The Minister-Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy, Sinitsyn, interpreted the events of 3 February as an apogee of the crisis in the Derg, strengthening the revolutionary core within the military, headed by Mengistu. Another positive trend in Ethiopia's political development was the active inclusion of the masses in 'defence of the revolutionary fatherland,' which signified the transition to a decisive offensive against the counter-revolutionary forces. The Soviet representatives acknowledged, however, that the intention of the surrounding reactionary Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, to intervene in Ethiopia's internal affairs through the extension of military and political support for the Eritrean separatists formed a part of their strategy of establishing a 'Red Sea Arab union.' It was aimed against Ethiopia, making the Red Sea basin an 'Arab lake,' free of Soviet influence.<sup>641</sup> Therefore, the objective to strengthen Ethiopia's revolutionary transformation and ward off the attacks of Soviet regional Arab adversaries mixed both Cominternist and Narkomindel policy considerations. The

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<sup>638</sup> TASS, 4 February, GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 18879, l. 72.

<sup>639</sup> EPRA is the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party's guerrilla force, active in the rural areas of Tigray and Gondar regions.

<sup>640</sup> Memo, Scarlett to Bone, 'Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa,' 9 February 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2107, fo. 4.

<sup>641</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 249-51.

sending of token military supplies to Addis Ababa in the spring of 1977 was an expression of this thinking.

### V. 2.3 Deliveries of Soviet Bloc military material to Addis Ababa in early 1977

Moscow's justification for sending modest military support to Addis Ababa in early 1977 was two-fold. On the one hand, the Mengistu coup signalled to Soviet and Bloc allies' that the revolution was entering a decisive phase. Additionally, China's supplying of small arms to Ethiopia increased the likelihood of enhancing Beijing's influence in the country. Accordingly, after Mengistu had claimed power, various sources noticed that deliveries of Soviet military material to Ethiopia began to gather pace. The Americans assumed that these arms shipments were the result of an agreement signed in December 1976, and aimed to encourage other Bloc states to extend military support to Addis Ababa.<sup>642</sup>

New evidence, however, shows that some of these deliveries were agreed after Mengistu's coming to power. The Yugoslav Ambassador gathered from his Soviet colleague in Addis Ababa that military aid, awarded by the Soviet government to Ethiopia in February, worth tens of millions of roubles, was destined for the National Militia. Additionally, Moscow rushed in their military assistance in a bid to counter the Chinese, who had already been providing military assistance for the National Militia.<sup>643</sup> Consisting of around 300,000 peasants, drafted in just three months, the peasant militia proved to be an outstanding success of the revolution and even earned the admiration of

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<sup>642</sup> PRM/NSC-21, 1 April 1977, NSA, Ethiopia Collection, b. 2, f. PRM/NSC-21 Horn of Africa.

<sup>643</sup> Cable, Addis Ababa to Belgrade, 11 February 1977, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, fas. 34, dos. 1, sig. 48482, s. 1; See also informaion on Ethiopia and Ethiopian-Yugo relations in 'Prijem podpredsednika Privremenog vojnog administrativnog saveta Etiopije Atnafu Abate-a,' 27 February 1977, AJ, f. 837, KPR I-3-a/24-33, s. 6. Note also Memo, Stanishev to Velchev, 25 October 1976, TsDA, f.1, op.64, a.e. N 492, 5-BP, s. 15.

Western observers.<sup>644</sup> In March, the Derg approached a number of socialist countries requesting military support. Moscow responded positively to the appeal, and agreed to provide, free of charge, 7,000 items of small arms, as well as selling additional quantities.<sup>645</sup> Similarly, on 14 March, BKP CC Politburo decided to grant Addis Ababa small arms, worth 471,000 Lev.<sup>646</sup> In addition, the Czechoslovaks were also sounded out and they too were willing to reply favourably to Ethiopian's request for military support.<sup>647</sup> Therefore, Soviet attitudes towards the Ethiopian regime in the early 1977 demonstrated a departure from the Kremlin's previous cautious approach towards the Horn. For the first time since the beginning of the 1974 transformation in Ethiopia, the Soviet Union military assistance to post-Imperial Ethiopia was openly discussed in diplomatic circles. Moreover, the Moscow diplomats' affinity towards Mengistu, and their justification of his ruthless actions in early February prompted wide spread rumours of behind the scenes involvement by the Soviets.

#### V. 2.4 Soviet diplomats' alleged influence over Mengistu's Coup

The exact role of the Soviet Union and its allies, Cuba in particular, in Mengistu's seizure of power, remain unclear.<sup>648</sup> In the light of new findings, it appears plausible that prior to the coup, Mengistu had made some secret contacts with Soviet diplomats in Addis Ababa, the terms, conditions, and contents of which are still unclear. In their reported freelancing, it appears that Moscow's representatives, worked in unison with the

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<sup>644</sup> M. Mádra [editor-in-chief, *Rude Pravo*] 'Zpráva o služební cestě do Etiopie ve dnech 20/6 1/7/1977,' 3 August 1977, NAČR, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – Gustáv Husák, sv. 986, a.j. 9918, s. 2.

<sup>645</sup> Letter, MVnR to PB TsK BKP, 1 March 1977, TsDA, f.1, op.64, a.e. 492, 5-BP, s. 8.

<sup>646</sup> Resolution, B N5, PB TsK BKP, 14 March 1977, TsDA, f.1, op.64, a.e. 492, 5-BP, s. 1.

<sup>647</sup> 'Záznam,' 24 February 1977, NAČR, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – Gustáv Husák, sv. 986, a.j. 9916, s. 1.

<sup>648</sup> For a detailed discussion on the alleged role of the Soviet diplomats behind Mengistu's coup see R. Yordanov, 'Addis Abeba, 1977: Brüderliche Militärhilfe und globale militärische Strategie Die sowjetische Verwicklung in den Konflikt zwischen Äthiopien und Somalia,' in *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945–1991*, ed. A. Hilger (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2009), 244-5.

Kremlin's official line, aiming to identify the most trustworthy subject and to facilitate contacts between the Centre and the emerging local powerbroker, once the setting permitted it. We do not know, however, whether, prior to the coup, Mengistu might have had any contacts with other countries, such as China or Israel that might have prompted his extreme measures of early 1977.

Nevertheless, various accounts suggest of the presence of more tangible, albeit covert, measures by members of the Soviet embassy behind Mengistu's rise to power. The account of Capitan Meles Maru<sup>649</sup> attributes Mengistu's success to the Soviet Ambassador, Ratanov, who, ever since the formation of the Military Council in the summer of 1974, systematically, intensively, and repeatedly worked to gain direct influence over individual members of the Council. The Soviet Ambassador had found in Mengistu a man open to suggestion, owing to his uncontrolled ambition for power. In the months prior to the coup, Ratanov had been calling on the Derg on an almost daily basis, promulgating his 'recommendations.' Thus, in Meles' analysis and reminiscences, the Marxist-Leninist tendencies within the Military Council were to be attributed to 'Ratanov's burrowing activities.' Moreover, Moscow's envoy allegedly persuaded Mengistu to rid himself of all personal enemies, including Major Sisay and the group around Teferi. The second man in the Soviet Embassy, Sinitsyn, stood not far behind Ratanov in his activist approach and his efforts to gain influence over the military regime. He also allegedly played an active part in shaping the developments within the Derg.<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> On 3 February, Captain Meles Maru, a member of the Derg, was paying a visit to West Africa with an official delegation. Earlier he had been aide to Teferi Bante; on hearing of the latter's death, decided not to return to Ethiopia. Captain Meles subsequently travelled to West Germany where he was extensively questioned by the German authorities about the Derg. The German Ambassador to Addis Ababa has passed to the British in confidence a copy of the Meles' de-briefing report. See 'English translation of debriefing report on Capt Meles Maru's questioning by the West German authorities,' 10 May 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2094, fo. 94.

<sup>650</sup> 'Debriefing,' FCO 31/2094, fo. 94.

Sinitsyn's memoirs come as a partial confirmation of Meles' account. As soon as the news of the attempt on Mengistu's life in September 1976 became public, Sinitsyn, acting as temporary head of the Soviet diplomatic mission, paid a visit to Mengistu, conveying the Soviet leadership's satisfaction on learning of his surviving the assassination attempt. Following that, the Soviet diplomat secretly and unofficially, without Moscow's explicit mandate, met the Derg's first deputy chair in the second half of November. He assured him of his willingness to inform the Kremlin, should the latter decide to visit Moscow and seek assistance regarding the complicated situation within the PMAC. A few days later, Mengistu met Sinitsyn once again to inform him that, after a discussion with his colleagues, he was ready to visit Moscow. Sinitsyn claimed to have obtained the Kremlin's approval for Mengistu's request, provisionally scheduled for February 1977.<sup>651</sup> It was revealed later that, on Ambassador Ratanov's advice, Mengistu postponed the visit in the wake of the February coup.<sup>652</sup> It does not appear, however, that the pro-active line, devised by Soviet representatives in Addis Ababa, was licensed by Moscow. Made in complete secrecy, it seems to have originated at the Soviet Embassy. The actions of both Ambassador Ratanov and Counsellor Sinitsyn, however, do not seem to contradict Moscow's official line, as they served the purpose, on the one hand, of identifying the most trustworthy subject in a remarkably fluid political situation and, on the other, facilitating contacts between the Centre and the emerging local powerbroker, once the setting permitted it. One thing is certain; it seems rather far-fetched to assume, without explicit evidence, that the Soviet diplomats would have made an unequivocal suggestion to Mengistu to rid himself of his chief opponents.

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<sup>651</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 234; On the other hand, Paul Henze claimed that Mengistu was invited by the Kremlin in January 1977. See Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 194.

<sup>652</sup> 'Debriefing' FCO 31/2094; see also Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 246, and NIDC, 4 May 1977, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030100010006-0.

It is clear, however, that Mengistu was fully supported by the Soviets in Addis Ababa, and the story behind his climb to the top could be attributed, in one-way or other, to the close relations he developed with two of Moscow's most active representatives in the Ethiopian capital. According to the CIA, it was Mengistu, as the ruling group's single most influential member, who became largely responsible for the Derg's sharp leftward turn, by announcing a distinctly Marxist programme as the guide for transforming Ethiopian society,<sup>653</sup> while keeping a 'radical control of the PMAC.'<sup>654</sup> Similarly, he fits the image of a leader whose 'outlook and even [...] personal features [...] can be of great significance for the evolution of revolutionary democracy's ideological platform and practical activity.'<sup>655</sup>

With the elimination of his opponents in February, Mengistu captured the world's attention. Initially, in early 1974, the Russians in Addis Ababa knew almost nothing about the PMAC until they obtained disparate, and sometimes conflicting, evidence that the real 'engine' of the revolution was a group of young officers, led by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, who was officially announced as First Deputy Chairman of the Derg in November 1974. The Soviets' gathering of information on Mengistu was no better than that of the British or the American intelligence. Sinitsyn's background information on Mengistu resulted in a rather sketchy portrait. Born in Addis Ababa in June 1941, he was believed to be the illegitimate son of Dejazmatch Kebede Tessema, a senior official in the Imperial Court, and a servant girl. Whatever the truth, it seems plausible that he was brought up in Dejazmatch Kebede's household in Addis Ababa. Interestingly, whilst many senior Palace officials of the Imperial era were either executed or detained during

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<sup>653</sup> Director of Central Intelligence, 'Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa,' 7 May 1976, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP85T00353 R000100280001-5.

<sup>654</sup> See INR Report 572, 'Ethiopia: Radicals Stave off New Challenges,' 26 August 1976, FRUS, Volume E-6, Documents on Africa, 1973-1976, [accessed online on 20 July 2010].

<sup>655</sup> K. Brutents, *National Liberation Revolutions Today* (Moskva: Progress, 1977), 222, cited in Makrakis, 'Garrison Socialism,' 15.

the Revolution, Kebede remained free. Moreover, it was rumoured that, on his mother's side, Mengistu had Shankalla blood, which was regarded in Ethiopia as decidedly inferior. This was thought to provide further grounds for his resentment of the 'inbuilt inequalities of society.' Mengistu's military career began in 1957, when he enrolled in the Genet army-training centre. Two years later, he graduated with the rank of second lieutenant and began his duty in the third Infantry Division. In 1970, he was in the US on a course on the repair of artillery equipment. Until 1974, he was based in the headquarters of the same Third Division. During these years, he completed a correspondence course at University College, Addis Ababa and the University of Maryland, earning a degree in industrial economics.<sup>656</sup>

After he had become actively involved in Ethiopian political affairs, Mengistu managed to develop close relations with Moscow's representatives. Once, after a meeting with him, both Ratanov and Sinitsyn concluded that in his appearance and behaviour Mengistu possessed some 'Stalinist features,' and later Sinitsyn learned from people close to the Ethiopian leader that he had studied Stalin's personality, read his works and literature about him. In addition, there were other striking similarities between the two. Objectively, Mengistu's, mother came from a small nation in southern Ethiopia, similar to the national minority in Russia which Stalin represented; Mengistu later found himself, too, at the helm of a large multinational state - a former empire. Unsurprisingly, his status as influential and respectable leader, gained by his successes in attracting relatively broad social support behind the revolutionary transformation of the Ethiopian society, made him look, in the eyes of the USSR's diplomats, consistent and reliable in regard to the implementation of the policies of 'socialist orientation and friendship with the Soviet Union.'

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<sup>656</sup> For two separate portraits of Mengistu see Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 207-8; 214, and Day to Owen, TNA, FCO 31/2093, 15 June 1977, fo. 11.

Thus, from the standpoint of Soviet interests, Mengistu appeared the eminent political figure who was to strengthen ties and further cooperation between the two countries. It was as late as 1976 when he was promoted from the rank of Major to that of Lieutenant Colonel. This contrasted with the situation in other African states, where sergeants became marshals overnight.<sup>657</sup> The Bloc diplomats also praised him for his balanced character a modest demeanour. In addition, despite the fact that he reached the top office at a very young age, within a short time he showed great ability of managing the challenges and obligations associated with his position. Clearly, Mengistu was regarded as a committed advocate of the path of Socialist building.<sup>658</sup>

### V. 3. Fidel Castro enters the fray

In addition to increased Soviet involvement, early 1977 saw an intensification of Cuba's engagement and interest in the region. Unlike previous Soviet-Cuban activity in Africa, notably in Angola, in the Horn's case, it appeared that Moscow, on the one hand, and Cuba and the other Bloc states, on the other, acted in closer co-ordination and communication in exchange of views on local developments. Havana, in this respect, played an instrumental role. Besides, Cuba's early involvement in the Horn followed the general pattern developed by the Soviet Union; initially, it took a more circumspect position and aimed to establish relations with Somalia, while not instigating or supporting a military solution to the Somali grievances against their neighbours. In the Horn of Africa, however, with the advent of Mengistu, Havana began taking a more prominent role. To a certain extent, the Cuban leader helped cement, not only the Kremlin's, but also his East German counterparts' conviction of Mengistu's revolutionary potential.

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<sup>657</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 227-8.

<sup>658</sup> 'Mengistu Haile Mariam,' c. 1981, NAČR, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – Gustáv Husák, sv. 984, a.j. 9913, ss. 1-2.

### V. 3.1 Cuba and the Horn

At first, Havana showed little interest in the Horn. The situation began to change after 21 October 1969, when Siad Barre seized power in Mogadishu and proclaimed the new regime's commitment to the construction of a socialist society in 1970. Yet, the full development of Somali-Cuban ties had to wait for another two years, when on 19 July 1972 both states established full diplomatic relations. Following that, on 17 August, in a joint communiqué Cuba acknowledged the right of the Somali population in Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia to self-determination. Nevertheless, at the same time, it emphasised that reunification through war, regardless of the Somali right to self-determination, was unacceptable, as it would have contradicted the United Nations' Charter and the OAU's guiding principles. Cuba, thus, wished to broaden its diplomatic ties, while remaining true to its Marxist principles on the nationalities question, thus avoiding any breach of international law.<sup>659</sup> Nevertheless, true to their revolutionary zeal, the Cubans did not shrink from providing the Somalis with guerrilla training. In the summer of 1976, 300 Cubans took part in military training and supplied small arms to the 'victory pioneer,' a strong paramilitary youth organisation, which worked under the direct leadership of the former political bureau of the Somali SRC. Consequently, the Cubans replaced the North Koreans, who had held a monopoly in organising and training guerrilla units.<sup>660</sup>

### V. 3.2 The evolution in Cuba's outlook towards the Horn

The development of Somali-Cuban relations prior to Mengistu's coup demonstrates Havana's nuanced position on the sharpest conflicting issues between the two neighbouring

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<sup>659</sup> N. Valdés, 'Cuba's Involvement in the Horn of Africa: The Ethiopian-Somali War and the Eritrean Conflict,' *Cuban Studies* 10, no. 1 (1980): 51.

<sup>660</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade, 3 August 1976, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, fas. 227, d. 10, sig. 443676, s. 1.

countries. In the early months of 1977 a significant change in Cuba's outlook towards the Somali leadership occurred. Havana took a radical turn in favour of the new Ethiopian regime, headed by Mengistu, who was seen as a true revolutionary. Fidel Castro embarked on a three-day visit to the region in mid-March, during which he enhanced Mengistu's standing by extending timely praise for Addis Ababa's regime. So it was, that only five weeks after his accession to power, Mengistu hosted one of the world's most known revolutionary figures, being given fulsome praise.<sup>661</sup> As the Bulgarian ambassador observed, the visit was intended to demonstrate the increased confidence and cooperation between Revolutionary Ethiopia and the socialist countries.<sup>662</sup> Additionally, Sinitsyn remembers that Castro's presence in Addis Ababa left a feeling of 'revolutionary freshness,' free of the superpower's burden of international responsibility.<sup>663</sup>

On 16 March 1977, the Cuban leader mediated a joint meeting in Aden between the leaders of Somalia, Ethiopia, and the PDRY, for the establishment of a federation, based on their progressive orientation. Mengistu appealed to Siad for the coordination of actions to repel the 'imperialist and reactionary forces' which simultaneously threatened both Ethiopia and Somalia. Siad, on the other hand, subscribed to an inflexible position by suggesting the annexation of the Ogaden region as a condition for normalising Ethiopian-Somali relations. He demanded that the transfer of the Ogaden territory into Somalia is resolved first, allowing all parties to proceed with the formation of the federation.<sup>664</sup> In Siad's understanding, the new Ethiopian regime continued Haile Selassie's policy of occupying foreign territories. He, furthermore, refused to classify the developments in Ethiopia as a national-democratic revolution. In return, the Cubans

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<sup>661</sup> Memo, Day to Ewans, 'Castro's visit to Ethiopia,' TNA, FCO 31/2079, 25 March 1977, fo. 33a.

<sup>662</sup> A. Tsankov, 'Poseshteniето na dr. Fidel Kastro v Etiopiya,' 30 March 1977, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 63, p. 1163, s. 9, l. 73.

<sup>663</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 255.

<sup>664</sup> Additions to 2 February 1977 Report by Third African Department, MID, USSR on 'Somalia's Territorial Disagreements with Ethiopia and the Position of the USSR,' c. May- June 1977, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1619, ll. 61-8, in CWIHPB, 8-9 (1996/7), 61.

accused the Somali leaders of failing to understand the essence of the Ethiopian revolution. In Castro's opinion, the Somalis had prioritised their nationalistic interests and found themselves under the influence of reactionary Arab countries.<sup>665</sup>

Almost immediately, after Castro's shuttle in the Horn, another high-level regional summit took place in the North Yemeni capital Taiz on 22 and 23 March 1977, that helped strengthen the Cuban leader's impression of Siad's attitudes and policies. The leaders of Somalia, PDRY, the Yemen Arab Republic, and the Sudan attended the Taiz summit.<sup>666</sup> Moscow, however, was not impressed by Siad's attendance,<sup>667</sup> which was perceived as a demonstration of his willingness to reduce dependence on Moscow for arms and spare parts, thereby, symbolising his effort to align himself more closely with the moderate Arab states in the region.<sup>668</sup> In general, the Somali attendance, gave credence to the opinion that Mogadishu was stepping up its activities directed towards finding a solution to the territorial dispute with Ethiopia, by turning to any possible source of help.<sup>669</sup> The Arab reaction, therefore, was perceived as capitalising on this attitude in Mogadishu in order to include Somalia in the struggle against the progressive Ethiopian regime. This was ultimately seen as a part of the strategy of turning the Red Sea into an 'Arab Lake,' designed to remove Moscow from the region.

The failure of the Aden summit and Siad's participation at the Taiz conference worked in favour of Mengistu's cause. The Somali President's negative attitude towards the Ethiopian Revolution sharpened Castro's criticism of Mogadishu.<sup>670</sup> In a fortnight,

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<sup>665</sup> A. Tsankov, 'Poseshteniето na dr. Fidel Kastro', s. 8, l. 72.

<sup>666</sup> More detail on the Taiz conference see in K. Weiss, *The Soviet Involvement in the Ogaden War* (Alexandria: Centre for Naval Analyses, 1980), 7 and R. Remnek, 'The Strategic Importance of Bab al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa,' in *The Horn of Africa and Arabia*, eds. D. Korn et al (Tampa: Defense Academic Research, 1990), 3. See also R. Burrowes, 'The Other Side of the Red Sea and a Little More,' in *The Horn of Africa and Arabia*, 66-7.

<sup>667</sup> R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington: Brookings, 1985), 697.

<sup>668</sup> Weiss, *The Soviet Involvement*, 6ff.

<sup>669</sup> D. Bozhilov, 'Otnosno proveden razgovor za politicheskite tseli na uchastieto na Somaliya na sresthata v Taiz,' 25 April 1977, DA MVnR, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 181, pr. 3795, ss. 2-3, ll. 13-4.

<sup>670</sup> Sinityn, *Missiya*, 255.

Castro shared his opinion with the Secretary General of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), Erich Honecker. The Cuban leader saw Siad's socialism as an outer shell that was supposed to attract the attention of the Socialist countries from which he had received weapons, while his socialist doctrine was only for the masses. According to Castro, the Somali leader thought of himself as if he were 'at the summit of wisdom.' His position, at the end, posed a danger not only to the revolution in Somalia, but also to the developments in Ethiopia and risked isolating the PDRY. In particular, Castro emphasised that Siad's policies supported the reactionary circles in his country, which were likely to 'deliver Somalia into the arms of Saudi Arabia and Imperialism.'

The Aden summit, thus, helped the Cuban leader's assessment that the socialist states faced the dilemma of either risking Siad's friendship by extending a helping hand to Ethiopia, or jeopardising the future of the Ethiopian Revolution by refusing to help Addis Ababa.<sup>671</sup> In the Cuban leader's opinion, the socialist countries appeared to be able to inflict 'a severe defeat on the entire reactionary imperialist policy' in Africa; therefore, taking the correct course in the Horn was crucial. Ethiopia had, in this sense, a powerful revolutionary potential to act as a counterweight to Egypt's defection, and Castro shared with Honecker his conviction that a success in Ethiopia might even influence Sadat to change course, which would help diminish the imperialist influence in the Middle East. This was a possibility that was worth discussing with the Soviet Union, whose policies and example the socialist states were to follow.<sup>672</sup> In this way, Castro's diplomatic efforts in the spring, played an important role in helping strengthen the views of other Bloc

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<sup>671</sup> The Moscow's Horn of dilemma was apparently well understood by the Addis Ababa regime. According to a report by the Yugoslav Ambassador to Addis Ababa, Vujinovic, the Ethiopian Defence Minister, Ayalew Mandefro reiterated in a conversation with him that the Russians were in difficult and delicate situation vis-à-vis Somalia and Ethiopia with the danger being by supporting the Ethiopian revolution to lose positions in Somalia. See Cable, Addis Ababa to Belgrade, 17 March 1977, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Etiopija 1977, fasc. 34, dos. 1, sig. 414611, s. 1.

<sup>672</sup> Memcon, Honecker-Castro, 3 April 1977 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMo BArch), DY30 JIV 2/201/1292 in CWIHPB, 58ff.

state's on the Horn, and justified Cuba's subsequent involvement in the region, which developed in close coordination with Moscow.

### V. 3.3 Havana's activism, Moscow's hesitation and the idea of an Ethiopian-Somali Federation

The degree of Cuban-Soviet coordination at this early stage, however, and the Soviet role behind the federation idea in the Horn of Africa is still rather uncertain.<sup>673</sup> The Soviet Union's actions were designed once again to contain both neighbours, as the outbreak of hostility was against her interest, as it could have potentially involved not only the Kremlin, but also its arch enemy - the White House. Initially, in the spring, Moscow tried to avoid playing a part in the escalating conflict and at first, it showed no intention to mediate in the Ethiopian-Somali dispute. In this situation, it appears that Castro played a crucial role in guaranteeing the Bloc's involvement in finding a peaceful solution to the Ethiopian-Somali issue, by taking the initiative and attempting to gather support for the federation.

Castro's diplomatic activity, therefore, seemed to fit well with Moscow's desire to keep a low profile for the time being. While some American reports suggest that Castro 'conjured' the idea of a socialist 'confederation' [sic] himself,<sup>674</sup> the federation idea between Somalia and Ethiopia was, in fact, neither of Havana's, nor of Moscow's making. It was a rather old local concept, which both neighbours had supported at various times. During Siad Barre's visit to Moscow in March 1976, when he addressed the 25<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress, the Somali President sounded out the Kremlin leadership about the possibility of creating a Somali-Ethiopian federation. The proposal then, as in 1977, did not go further, as the Somalis wanted first to form the Federation and abolish the

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<sup>673</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 632. See also Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 202-3 and W. LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa, 1959-1980* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1980), 38.

<sup>674</sup> Interagency Assessment of the Ethiopian-Somali Situation (Draft), 6 August 1977, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79R00603A002900090006-9.

existing borders between the two countries and then to begin solving concrete problems such as water, transport, and trade. This was rejected by Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's approach was the opposite; it aimed to solve the problems first and then attempt to form a federation. This plan, according to the Russians, seemed feasible.<sup>675</sup> Neither party was able to find a middle ground, however, and the proposal floundered. It seemed clear that, after the failure of the federation scenario, the Soviets saw an advantage in steering clear of any involvement in Somali-Ethiopian bilateral problems. The British observers saw Moscow as too closely engaged with both countries. This, at the time, rendered its desire to remain aloof virtually impossible.<sup>676</sup>

In the final analysis, Moscow was quite optimistic about the long-term development of the Ethiopian-Somali dispute. The Kremlin thought that Mogadishu would be dealing with the territorial issue for years to come - at least half a century. They also believed that, eventually, the Somalis would become psychologically mature and they would find some economic, political, and other conditions for the creation of a peaceful '*modus vivendi*' with the Ethiopians.<sup>677</sup> In addition, the fear of antagonising Mogadishu and raising Addis Ababa's suspicion of the Kremlin's regional intentions, might have steered Moscow away from wishing to apply quick solutions to the complex Ethiopian problems.<sup>678</sup> This explains Moscow's intention of maintaining a long-term presence in the region, in general, and supporting peaceful co-existence between the two states of socialist orientation, in particular.

On the other hand, the Cuban involvement began to gather momentum. On 25 May, two months following the end of the Aden summit, the US State Department

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<sup>675</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade, 27 July 1976, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Mala Zemalja [... Somalija ...] 1976, fasc. 227, dos. 10, sig. 442695, s. 1.

<sup>676</sup> Letter, Mallaby to Ewans, 20 June 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2081, fo. 120.

<sup>677</sup> Cable, Mogadishu to Belgrade, 27 July 1976, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Mala Zemalja [... Somalija ...] 1976, fasc. 227, dos. 10, sig. 442695, s. 1.

<sup>678</sup> Cf. TASS [information on Reuter's report on Ethiopian-Soviet relations], 2 May 1977, GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 18881, l. 27.

reported that fifty Cuban advisers had been transported from Somalia to Ethiopia to train Ethiopian forces in the use of Soviet military equipment. On the same day, the Somali Defence Minister, Ali Samatar, was sent to Moscow, to seek assurance from the Soviet leaders that they were not planning to arm Ethiopia.<sup>679</sup> Accordingly, Siad declared on the same day - 25 May – that ‘Somalia would make a historic decision’ if the USSR continued to arm Ethiopia.<sup>680</sup> In this threatening statement, he stressed that Somalia would not remain neutral, while Somali people in the Ogaden region in Eastern Ethiopia were dying at the hands of non-Africans. As reported by Lefort,<sup>681</sup> on 1 June, a wave of sabotage operations carried out by the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), followed in the Ogaden. Because of its grazing land the Somali pastoralists viewed the Ogaden as vital as they relied on trans-border pastures, water, feeder roads, and market facilities.<sup>682</sup> By the summer of 1977, Havana, like Moscow, while seeking to broaden its diplomatic ties in the area and remaining true to its revolutionary principles on the nationalities question, aimed to avoid the breach of international law by opting for a series of reconciliation measures. When those failed, however, the Cuban leadership came to realise that the situation in the Horn was deteriorating. This prompted them to address the issue with the Soviet leadership. During the summer, therefore, Moscow openly took the initiative.

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<sup>679</sup> See for more details on Cuba’s involvement in the Horn in summer of 1977 Porter, *The USSR in the Third World Conflicts*, 204; see also LeoGrande, *Cuba’s Policy in Africa*, 39, who cited *New York Times* from 13 March, 1977 and *Washington Post* from 18 March, 1977. A Washington spokesperson, cited by Legum and Lee, reported that the advisers were to be followed by 400-500 Cuban troops. On 26 May, the US Ambassador to UN Andrew Young reported that the presence of the Cuban advisers in Ethiopia ‘might be a very good thing’ if Cuban advice could stop the bloodshed, see Legum and Lee, 1977, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, see also Legum, ‘Angola and the Horn of Africa,’ 616.

<sup>680</sup> *Al Yaqa* (Kuwait), 27 June, 1977. At the same time, according to *The Daily Telegraph* from 27 May 1977, Samatar summoned the ambassadors of the Warsaw Pact countries and made it clear that continued Soviet and Cuban aid to the ‘false regime’ in Addis Ababa would endanger Somalia’s relations with these countries, cited in Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 210.

<sup>681</sup> Lefort, *Ethiopia*, 288.

<sup>682</sup> According to Charles Geschekter, the Somalis long ago evolved a system of nomadic rotation across the rangelands. The author concluded that ‘the colonialist partition of the Horn disrupted that integrity when Somali rangelands were chopped up and divided among Italy, Britain, and Ethiopia.’ See Geschekter, ‘Socio-Economic Developments in Somalia,’ 25.

#### V. 4. Horn and the superpowers in the spring of 1977

Soon after Mengistu came to power, the Administration of the newly elected President Carter began to distance itself from Addis Ababa's regime, owing to its poor human rights record. Mengistu, however, pre-empted the American withdrawal from Ethiopia by closing most US operations in the country. The closure of American institutions showed the Kremlin Mengistu's sincerity in embracing the Socialist idea. In the beginning of May, the Ethiopian leader embarked on a long-awaited trip to Moscow; a visit in which the Soviet leadership praised, once again, Mengistu's revolutionary potential. The Cubans concurred with the Soviet assessment. Mengistu's drastic measures against the Americans attracted wide support within the Socialist Bloc. Simultaneously, despite realising the potential hazards of aiding the Somali regime, the Carter Administration tentatively entered talks with Somali representatives in Washington on the possibility of rendering defensive military assistance to Mogadishu. The American attempt to engage with Ethiopia's neighbour, heightened Moscow's suspicion of eventual Western backing of hostile Somali actions against the Ethiopian regime, threatening the socialist transformation in the country.

##### V. 4.1 The break of Ethiopian-US ties

Partly elected on the promise of restoring the moral basis of American foreign policy, President Carter lost no time in making known his displeasure at what was taking place in Ethiopia. As the new Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, stated, 'the Carter Administration inherited a complex and shifting political situation in the Horn of Africa.' Within a month of being sworn in, Vance told a Senate hearing on 25 February 1977 that he had removed

Ethiopia from the list of recipients of American aid because of human rights violations.<sup>683</sup> The Soviet Bloc diplomats saw the American moves in the aftermath of Mengistu's coup as part of a broader strategy to undermine the Ethiopian Revolution. Accordingly, Washington, perceived the event of 3 February 1977 as 'a big victory for the progressive leader of the Derg, Mengistu.'<sup>684</sup> In this situation, the US considered hedging its bets on the second vice-chairman of the PMAC, Atnafu Abate, because of his conviction that Ethiopia should develop relations with all countries, regardless of their political orientation. In an attempt to put pressure on the Derg's leadership, the US decreased aid of all kinds to Ethiopia, including military, and aimed to step up its support for the internal opposition, especially for the Ethiopian Democratic Union, intending to destabilise Ethiopian-Somali relations.<sup>685</sup>

While not related to Mengistu's succession, in April 1977, the US Government decided to close the Kagnev Station, which back in the 1960s was responsible for activities ranging from super-secret intercepts of Soviet missile traffic to relaying communications in that part of the world.<sup>686</sup> With this closure Washington wanted to send a political message to the Ethiopia military regime that they were disengaging from them.<sup>687</sup> The White House also took into account the realities of the Cold War in reconsidering the further provision of support to Ethiopia. Of particular concern to the US was the warming of relations between Ethiopia and the Bloc. The participants in the Policy Review Committee meeting of 11 April 1977 recommended not to pull out

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<sup>683</sup> S. Makinda, *United States Policy in the Horn of Africa since 1974* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983), 368.

<sup>684</sup> See 'Vrazhdebni planove na SASht po otnoshenie na rezhima v Etiopiya,' no. 2718, ANRS, MVR-DS, f.9, d. 2843, ch. II, ss. 2-3, ll. 7-8.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid. Cf also a memorandum of 18 March 1977, Henze to Brzezinski, about the possible help that Washington could request by the Iranians and the Saudis the US is able to directly support the EDU - 'the only group which espouses goals and principles akin to our own ideas' and 'is really friendly to us,' as Henze wrote. J[immy] C[arter] P[residential] L[ibrary], NSA Staff Material Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 3/77.

<sup>686</sup> Interview with D. Shinn on 5 July 2002, LoC, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>687</sup> See two memos by Henze to Brzezinski from 28 March 1977 and 31 March 1977, JCPL, NSA Staff Material Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 3/77.

entirely from Ethiopia entirely, because of Washington's wish to be in position if a friendlier and more humane government came to power. Nonlethal military aid, already in the pipeline, was to be delivered, and military training of Ethiopians in the United States was to continue.<sup>688</sup>

As a result, Carter agreed to Kagnew's closure in September and to the reduction in the numbers of personnel of the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG), of which Mengistu was informed on 22 April.<sup>689</sup> Just before breaking the news to the Ethiopian regime, Washington received confidential information about the Ethiopian Government's decision to tell Washington within 72 hours that they wanted the closure of the MAAG, United States Information Agency's (USIA) offices, and the Asmara consulate. In addition, the US Embassy was to be reduced to a skeleton staff.<sup>690</sup> This indicated that Mengistu was expecting the American moves and was preparing retaliatory actions in advance. On 23 April, the Derg ordered the closure of the said American services. Washington reacted almost immediately and on 27 April, the Pentagon announced the suspension of all US military supplies to Ethiopia, including those already paid for.<sup>691</sup> The final straw in this sequence of events took place on 30 April when Mengistu abrogated the 1953 Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with Washington.

It is not clear whether the Soviet Union's representatives had a direct influence over Mengistu's decision to terminate the US' principal operations in Ethiopia. The increased contacts with the Soviet Ambassador and the visit to Moscow, however, hint at the possibility that Mengistu might have had some assurances that, should he get rid of the American interest in his country, he might expect more significant help from

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<sup>688</sup> Minutes, Policy Review Committee Meeting on Ethiopia and Horn of Africa, 11 April 1977, JCPL, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, b. 24, f. Meetings -- PRC 10: 4/11/77.

<sup>689</sup> *New York Times*, 27 April 1977, cited in D. Jackson, *Jimmy Carter and the Horn of Africa* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2007), 46.

<sup>690</sup> Note, Henze to Brzezinski, 22 April 1977, JCPL, NSA Staff Material Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 4-5/1977.

<sup>691</sup> Makinda, 'United States Policy in the Horn,' 368.

Moscow. Mengistu appeared highly reticent regarding the Russians, and no one knew what and how much, if anything, they had promised him. In the months since Mengistu had become leader of the Derg, the Soviet and Cuban ambassadors reportedly spent hours with him almost every day. The Soviet Ambassador dealt directly with Mengistu, bypassing the Foreign Ministry. Moscow's representative only visited the ministry when he had to inform the Ethiopian diplomats of decisions that had already reached in mutual accord with Mengistu.<sup>692</sup> As it appears, the abrogation of the Ethiopian-American military pact was motivated by Mengistu's conviction that he had already obtained full Soviet backing, suggested by the interest and the intensified contacts with Moscow, Havana, and the Bloc's representatives in Addis Ababa.

#### V. 4.2 Mengistu's visit to Moscow in May 1977

On 3 May 1977, only three days after abrogating the pact with Washington, Mengistu embarked upon a nine-day official visit to Moscow. On 6 May, he was received by Brezhnev.<sup>693</sup> The latter expressed concern about the worsening of the relations between the Horn's progressive states, stressing the urgent need for their improvement.<sup>694</sup> The main result from the visit, however, was the signing of a joint political document, showing each side's commitment to developing bilateral relations. Both parties also concluded economic, cultural and scientific, and consular agreements, which set the stage for an eventual Soviet-Ethiopian friendship treaty.<sup>695</sup> In addition, it appears, the Soviet military had also played an important role in the negotiations, as reportedly, Mengistu managed to sign a US\$ 504-million arms agreement with Ethiopia that was the largest Soviet accord with an African country at the time. This increased the total amount of

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<sup>692</sup> Dawit, *Red Tears*, 35-7.

<sup>693</sup> Sinityn, *Missiya*, 259.

<sup>694</sup> CWIHPB, 62.

<sup>695</sup> NIDC, 7 May 1977, CREST, NACP, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030100010012-3.

military aid pledged over the course of six months by the Soviet Union to Ethiopia to US\$ 640m, more than double the military aid provided to Mogadishu over the past decade.<sup>696</sup> Soon after, from mid-May until June *Le Monde* began reporting on deliveries of Soviet tanks T-34s, T-54s and armoured cars<sup>697</sup> to the port of Djibouti, which were later transported to Addis Ababa by rail.<sup>698</sup>

The Russians, attracted by the chance of opportunity in Ethiopia, apparently decided that they could embed in both countries simultaneously. According to British diplomats in Moscow, the Kremlin believed that Somalia was so closely bound to the Soviet Union that it could not afford to turn elsewhere for substantial economic and military assistance.<sup>699</sup> In June 1977, Professor Tarabrin, head of the African international issues department of the Africa Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which provided research back-up for Soviet policy-making towards the region, claimed there had been debates in his Institute and Moscow, at large as to whether it was right for Moscow, by courting Addis Ababa, to risk alienating Mogadishu. The interim conclusion was that there was no reason why Moscow could not be friends with both. In the final analysis, the Kremlin, was impressed by Mengistu's 'intelligence and the seriousness of his approach.'<sup>700</sup> In a conversation with his British colleague, Lev Mironov cautiously expressed Moscow's confidence in the Derg chair's ability to deal with Ethiopia's

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<sup>696</sup> This includes the amount allegedly agreed upon in December 1976; Cf. Intelligence Memorandum, 'Ethiopia: Assessment of Key Issues,' 16 June 1977, CREST, NACP, ESDN: CIA-RDP79R00603A002700020003-1.

<sup>697</sup> In addition, Western intelligence agencies reported that by July five plane-loads of arms shipments a week were arriving at the Addis Ababa airport. Similarly, Arab intelligence sources gathered information on Soviet Union's agreement to supply Ethiopia with USD 385 million worth of materiel, see Legum and Lee *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 94; and Legum, 'Angola and the Horn of Africa,' 615.

<sup>698</sup> With regard to the arms shipping from Djibouti to Addis Ababa, it is important to note that from June 1977 the WSLF cut the Addis-Djibouti railway. So, any reports, citing such deliveries to Addis Ababa via the railway should be carefully examined. On the other hand, the Assab-Kombolcha-Addis highway was carrying more traffic, and was not disrupted by the guerrilla forces, as Henze claimed in *Layers of Time*, 296.

<sup>699</sup> Letter, Holmes to Bone, 'Soviet-Ethiopian Relations and the Horn of Africa,' TNA, FCO 31/2107, 18 May 1977, fo. 25.

<sup>700</sup> Teleletter, Mallaby to Ewans, 20 June 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2081, fo. 120.

growing problems.<sup>701</sup> The Kremlin leaders were pleasantly surprised by his maturity, as well as by the fact that, in a long line of representatives of developing countries, he was the only one who asked the Russians for economic assistance.<sup>702</sup> Thus, by the time he returned to Addis Ababa, Mengistu left the Soviet leadership with the impression of a serious figure who firmly believed in his cause, which in turn made the Ethiopian regime worthy of the support of the Socialist Commonwealth.<sup>703</sup>

#### V. 4.3 The expansion of diplomatic relations between Mogadishu and Washington

From the first months of his administration, Carter expressed a clear desire to woo the Somalis away from Moscow and to encourage them to expel the Russians stationed in their country. Washington's reported determination to engage in Mogadishu, made Moscow increasingly wary of potential Western backing for aggressive Somali actions against the Ethiopian revolution. In April 1977, the US President was reported as telling his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and his National Security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, that he wanted them 'to move in every possible way to get Somalia to be our friend.'<sup>704</sup> It should be noted, however, that the American exploration of opportunities to bring Somalia closer dates to as early as February 1977, well before Mengistu's expulsion of Washington's military advisors. Then Paul Henze elaborated that it might prove 'a good idea' to try to use Somali concern over Soviet arms supplies to Ethiopia, in an attempt to encourage them to take a more distanced stance vis-à-vis Moscow.<sup>705</sup>

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<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>702</sup> Mádra, 'Zpráva,' 2.

<sup>703</sup> CPSU CC to SED CC, Information on Visit of Mengistu Haile Mariam to Moscow, 13 May 1977, SAPMO, J IV 2/202/583 in CWIHPB, 61.

<sup>704</sup> Halliday and Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 226.

<sup>705</sup> Memo, Henze to Aaron, 22 February 1977, JCPL, NSA Staff Material Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 2/77.

Later, at the end of March, the Vice President, Walter Mondale, noted the piece of intelligence reporting about the Castro's failure to resolve differences between Somalia and Ethiopia. He then showed an interest in explaining if Mogadishu could be persuaded to align with the US.<sup>706</sup> However, Brzezinski recommended to Mondale that, even if the Somalis were warming rapidly to the US, Washington had to be cautious, as the situation in Ethiopia was uncertain and the White House was not yet ready to abandon Ethiopia in exchange for its neighbour. Instead, the National Security Advisor suggested that Washington enlist the help of as many of its friends and allies as possible in the region. Importantly, the US had to exercise restraint regarding Somalia for her deep-seated irredentism. Additionally, the Somalis were not to be allowed to think that America would support their territorial claims.<sup>707</sup>

The rapidly developing situation in the Horn, however, required immediate action. On 16 June, the Somali Ambassador, Addou, met President Carter and delivered an urgent message from Siad, who claimed that Soviet-backed Ethiopia was preparing to invade Somalia. Carter told Addou that if Somalia were attacked, Washington would consider sending out defensive military material to Mogadishu. Allegedly, the Ambassador delivered this message to Siad in more positive terms than Carter's response justified.<sup>708</sup> However, on 15 July, President Carter approved a decision 'in principle' to supply Somalia with defensive arms to protect its present territory.<sup>709</sup> Apparently, Moscow was aware that Siad, during his visit to Saudi Arabia in July 1977, had been offered US\$460m worth of American weapons, to be supplied if Somalia broke entirely

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<sup>706</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to Henze, 24 March 1977, JCPL, Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 3/77.

<sup>707</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to Mondale, ca. March 1977, JCPL, Horn/Special, b. 1, f. 3/77.

<sup>708</sup> See Petterson, 'Ethiopia Abandoned? An American Perspective,' 638; Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 212. Cf. Henze, *Layers of Time*, 300.

<sup>709</sup> See Petterson, 'Ethiopia Abandoned?,' 638; Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, 288; Legum, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 618.

with the Soviet Union.<sup>710</sup> Accordingly, Saudi Arabia's increased interest in the Horn widened the geographic scope of the Ethiopian-Somali dispute. The combination between narrow Horn considerations and wider Middle East policy calculations increased the superpowers' interest in the local affairs.

In mid-July, the Somalis invaded the Ogaden and in less than two weeks captured 112 towns and 85 per cent of the region.<sup>711</sup> In return, in August when guerrilla actions in Ogaden became 'too obvious to ignore,' a State Department official announced that President Carter had changed his mind about providing arms to Somalia.<sup>712</sup> At about that time, a number of Russian military advisers began leaving Somalia, which was under reactionary Arab, mainly Saudi Arabian, pressure to break its ties with Moscow. As reports suggest, some of the advisers who left were transferred by Russia to Ethiopia. Mogadishu's representatives in Nairobi, however, strongly rejected suggestions of any impending break in Somali-Soviet relations. As one Somali diplomat put it 'you don't get rid of one pair of shoes until you get another pair.'<sup>713</sup>

## V. 5. Soviet Union and Somalia in the summer of 1977

In the summer, the Kremlin continued its previous policy, aimed at maintaining a presence in Somalia and Ethiopia, by delivering small amounts of military material and

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<sup>710</sup> Brutents, *Tridtsat' let na Staroĭ ploshchadi* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1998), 212. Cf. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 701, cited N. Matheson's *The 'Rules of the Game'* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 91; According to LeoGrande, the Saudis offered to Somalia USD 350 million, outbidding Soviets' offer to increase its aid to Somalia if would cease hostilities; see *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, 39. Cf. Decision Minutes, PRC on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, 11 April 1977, JCPL, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, b. 24, Subject File, f. Meetings - - PRC 10: 4/11/77. Apparently then US was willing to 'let the Saudis take the lead in offering money for military aid' to the Somalis.

<sup>711</sup> LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, 39; In July, the Somali army intervened in the Ogaden and with the WSLF it reached Jijiga, Dire Dawa and Harar, shortly after the fall of Dekamere (7 July) and Keren (8 July) in Eritrea, see Lefort, *Ethiopia*, 288.

<sup>712</sup> LeoGrande, 39; Petterson 'Ethiopia Abandoned?' 639; see also *Washington Post*, 26 September 1977, cited in Legum, 'Angola and the Horn of Africa,' 618. Legum also noted that US refused to grant permission to Saudi Arabia and Iran to supply old American arms in their own arsenals, cf. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 702-3.

<sup>713</sup> R. O'Brien, 'Soviet' Advisers Start Pullout From Somalia,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1977, 4, cited in FBIS, Daily Reports, Sub-Saharan Africa, VIII, no. 137, FBIS-SSA-77-137, 18 July 1977, B4.

attempting to intensify its mediation in the conflict between both neighbours. After the closure of the American institutions in Ethiopia, however, and the consequent rapprochement between Mogadishu and Washington, the Horn entered a crucial phase. It changed the dynamics of Moscow's subsequent involvement. The new realities on the ground required Moscow to alter its approach in a bid to keep both sides from starting a military conflict. Unlike in the spring, when Castro took the diplomatic initiative, the Kremlin decided to launch an attempt at mediation. It failed, however, to change Siad's aggressive intentions towards Ethiopia.

Moscow continued to face the dilemma of whether to discontinue arms deliveries to Somalia and to throw the regime into the arms of the West and the Arab world. In an attempt not to make any drastic moves, which might exacerbate the situation, the Soviet Union opted for a continuation of the deliveries of spare parts and ammunitions to Somalia. At the same time, it increased the deliveries of non-essential military material to Ethiopia. While this might appear controversial, Moscow's decision to maintain deliveries to both parties suggests that the Kremlin believed both states might come to terms. It seems, therefore, that in its analysis Moscow had overestimated the importance of socialist solidarity as a force that might overturn local nationalistic moods. Consequently, the guerrilla raids into Ogaden, launched in late July and backed by Siad, showed to the Eastern Bloc that the situation was going from bad to worse. In order to preserve a Soviet foothold in the Horn, discussions at the highest levels in Moscow, including Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kosygin, Suslov, Ponomarev, and Kirilenko at the Politburo chose to engage in a tougher stance towards Siad whose aggressive actions severely threatened the Ethiopian revolution and coincided with the interests of Moscow's international opponents.

### V. 5.1 The failure of Moscow's good offices

The intensification of Ethiopian-Somali hostility in the summer of 1977 challenged the Soviet leadership's policy towards the Horn. At first, the Kremlin suspended the normal flow of spare parts and new military equipment to Somalia, apparently out of deference to its new ally Ethiopia, following Mengistu's 'triumphant visit' to Moscow in May. The brief suspension of arms deliveries was followed by a quick resumption, which illustrated the dilemma that the fighting in South-eastern Ethiopia presented for Moscow. In effect, it became the main military supplier and foreign backer for both Somalia and Ethiopia.

Ironically, there was every indication that it was the Soviet decision to supply Mengistu with arms that was responsible for the intensification of the wars in both southeast and northern Ethiopia. Arab diplomats pointed out that the arrival of Soviet Bloc military supplies in Addis Ababa, at the beginning of March, made it crucial for the Somali and the Eritrean insurgents to press for victory immediately, before Mengistu's regime became too strong.<sup>714</sup> Subsequently, the Soviets found themselves under increasing pressure by both Somalia and Ethiopia to stop supplying arms to the other party. While Moscow appeared determined to straddle the conflict in a bold bid to emerge as the dominant foreign power in both countries, this tactical approach was proving increasingly untenable as the level of hostilities between the two neighbouring states, considered the worst ever between two black African countries, continued to grow.<sup>715</sup> According to Western observers, the Soviets were caught in a trap by supporting both sides. Thus, in shaping Soviet local moves, an important role was played by the Kremlin's wish to keep its foothold in the local setting at a minimal cost. Escalation of the conflict into full blown war was considered to be against the Kremlin's regional

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<sup>714</sup> D. Ottaway, 'Moscow in a dilemma over its African role,' *The Guardian*, 8 August 1977, 5.

<sup>715</sup> D. Ottaway, 'Moscow Finding it Hard to Satisfy Both Ethiopia, Somalia,' *The Washington Post*, 27 September 1977, A14.

interest. Thus, Moscow realised the need to extricate itself as best it could which, according to Soviet regional calculations, was by brokering a ceasefire.<sup>716</sup>

The efforts to secure Moscow's mediating services in the Ethiopian-Somali dispute preceded the launch of Siad sponsored massive WSLF raids into the Ogaden in late-July 1977. In early 1976, Siad Barre informed Moscow of Mogadishu's intention to enter negotiations with the Ethiopian leadership about the creation of a federation between Somalia and Ethiopia. The Somali President requested that the Kremlin join the negotiations as a mediator. As long as the character of the federation proposal remained unclear, Moscow decided to avoid mediating in the issue. Later, in November 1976, Siad expressed once more his wish that the Soviets transmit to the Ethiopian leadership Somalia's willingness to launch a peaceful dialogue on the disputed issues between the two states. The Somali request was set in motion, and the Chairman of the Committee for Political and Foreign Affairs of the Derg was informed of Siad's intentions via the Soviet representation in Ethiopia. At the end of 1976, the Cubans and the South Yemenis offered their help in finding a settlement of the Somali-Ethiopian dispute.<sup>717</sup>

Later, in March 1977, Castro's attempt at reconciling both parties floundered. At the beginning of April, during a brief visit to Somalia, underlining Moscow's interest in regional stability, the Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Podgorny, attempted to reason with Siad Barre. In reply, the Somali president expressed his readiness to continue the search for a 'mutually acceptable formula' for resolving the problems facing Ethiopia and Somalia and yet again requested the Kremlin's help in organising a meeting with Mengistu. In early May, during Mengistu's visit to Moscow, in accordance with Siad's wish, the hosts proposed to the Ethiopian leader, organising a

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<sup>716</sup> C. Legum, 'Russia tries to end Horn war,' *The Observer*, 25 September 1977, 4.

<sup>717</sup> Third African Department, Soviet MFA, 'Somalia's Territorial disagreements with Ethiopia and the position of the USSR,' 2 February 1977, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1632, ll. 39-44; transl. M. Doctoroff, in CWIHPB, 53.

meeting for the establishment of good-neighbourly relations between Somalia and Ethiopia. While Mengistu accepted the proposal, in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador, on 17 May, Siad declared that he was not yet ready to sit at the negotiating table with the Ethiopian leader.<sup>718</sup>

In mid-July 1977, the Derg received a communication from Ratanov that a meeting at an expert level was to take place in Moscow between 26 and 28 July. The Soviet Ambassador also advised both parties that, prior to the meeting, they should refrain from any steps that would further complicate matters.<sup>719</sup> To Moscow, it seemed that both parties were determined to avoid military conflict between them. Nevertheless, the Russians realised there were serious difficulties, inherited from the colonial past, hampering the establishment of friendly contacts between the Somali and the Ethiopian leaderships.<sup>720</sup> Despite all of Siad's assurances and Soviet mediation efforts, on 23 July, three days prior to the Moscow meeting, Somalia launched an attack on Ethiopia,<sup>721</sup> using WSLF's paramilitary units, which Mogadishu had been actively supporting since 1975.<sup>722</sup> Thus, Siad openly renounced the preconditions set before the planned Moscow negotiations.

On 29 July, a week after the launch of the Somali offensive in the Ogaden, Ambassador Ratanov and Mengistu met at the Soviet Embassy regarding a message the latter had transmitted to Brezhnev. In his message, the Ethiopian leader placed exceptional value on Soviet support offered to Ethiopia.<sup>723</sup> Following the receipt of the message, on 4 August 1977, at a Politburo meeting, Andrei Kirilenko noted that it was time for Moscow to decide what it was going to do about the worsening Somali-

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<sup>718</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>719</sup> Ethiopian Aide-Memoire to Soviet Officials in Moscow, 11 August 1977, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1635, ll. 55-57; transl. by Elizabeth Wishnick, in CWIHPB, 73.

<sup>720</sup> Soviet report on talks with Somali Vice-President, 13 June 1977, NAČR, KSC Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha – Gustáv Husák, k. 1360, i.č. 1455 Somalsko, ss. 1-2.

<sup>721</sup> Ethiopian Aide-Memoire, in CWIHPB, 73.

<sup>722</sup> Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship*, 111.

<sup>723</sup> TSKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1636, ll. 113-6, in CWIHPB, 69.

Ethiopian relations.<sup>724</sup> On 11 August, at another special Politburo meeting, Kirilenko conveyed Brezhnev's request to the Politburo to do everything possible in order to render all necessary assistance to Ethiopia.<sup>725</sup>

The Soviets and their East European allies still did not feel the need to launch all-out support for Mengistu. On 23 August 1977, the Cuban Ambassador was received by his Soviet colleague at Moscow's representation in Addis Ababa. During that secret meeting, Ratanov noted that the invitation of the Cuban military in line with Mengistu's request was likely to be complicated, not just for the socialist states, but also for the Derg itself.<sup>726</sup> Additionally, the Russians were warned of possible Arab involvement in the Horn. A report from CPSU to SED's Central Committee on the results of Podgorny's visit to Somalia gives insight on Siad's hint to the Soviet leader that the reactionary leaders of Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia sought to liquidate the progressive regime in Ethiopia.<sup>727</sup> In order to substantiate these claims, a secret background report, prepared by the MFA and the ID, noted that, at the time when the Soviet contingent was expelled from Somalia, Mogadishu began actively seeking the support of Muslim states, and obtained arms and secured the dispatch of military forces against Addis Ababa, under the banner of 'Islamic Solidarity.'<sup>728</sup> The US' approaches and the inclusion of the Arab factor further strengthened Mogadishu's aggressive local designs. Consequently, Moscow felt it had to harden its attitude towards Siad in order to halt his advances against Ethiopia, which jeopardised the radical transformation in the country, that was deemed to benefit the Kremlin's regional and global adversaries.

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<sup>724</sup> A[rkhiv] P[rezidenta] R[ossiiskoi] F[ederatsii], f. 3, op. 120, d. 37, ll. 44; 48, in CWIHPB, 70.

<sup>725</sup> APRF, f. 3, op. 120, d. 37, ll. 51; 56, in CWIHPB, 73.

<sup>726</sup> TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1637, ll. 118-19, in CWIHPB, 76.

<sup>727</sup> See a CPSU CC memo on Podgorny's visit to Africa, late March 1977, SAPMO, J IV 2/202 584, in CWIHPB, 53.

<sup>728</sup> TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 75, d. 1175, ll.13-23, in CWIHPB, 88.

## V. 5.2 Siad Barre's visit to Moscow in August 1977

As soon as the Somali-backed WSLF's attack on Ethiopia was launched, Mogadishu suffered a resounding setback, with Washington reversing its intention to supply defensive arms to Siad. In addition, the rather sporadic Arab support in the summer severely limited Somalia's bargaining power. As a result, Siad's visit to Moscow in late-August, when he sought Soviet mediation efforts again, showed his weakened stance. The Kremlin's leaders, criticising his lack of regard for Leninist philosophy on the nationalities question, were less inclined to act on the Somali pleas.

When Somalia launched its attacks on Ethiopia, however, in late July, the Soviet press remained silent. On 14 August, the official Soviet news agency, TASS, issued a statement calling for an immediate ceasefire and a negotiated settlement under the auspices of the OAU. The statement was careful not to place blame on either Ethiopia or Somalia. By the end of August, however, Soviet press commentary left little doubt about whom Moscow held responsible for the conflict. Commentaries in *Izvestiya*, *Pravda*, and *Za Rubezhom* implicitly criticised Somalia for its invasion of Ethiopia and called for strict adherence to the principles of territorial integrity.<sup>729</sup>

An important milestone in Moscow's change in its attitude towards the Somali-Ethiopian war, occurred during and immediately after Siad Barre's visit to the Soviet Union from 28 to 31 August. The 11-man Somali delegation, including members of the SRSP CC, ministers and heads of all major army units, left on a special Soviet plane from Mogadishu to Tashkent and Moscow. The hosts were led by Kosygin, present also were Suslov and Gromyko, as well as head of departments of the CPSU CC, Foreign Ministry representatives, and the Somali ambassador. The negotiations commenced on 28 August

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<sup>729</sup> USSR Weekly Review, Supplement, 'Soviet Tactics in the Horn of Africa,' 2 November 1977, NACP, RG263, Tranche Twenty-Two, b. 2, #17268 - # 28641.

with a statement by Siad in which he once again accused the Ethiopian regime of continuing the colonialist policy of Haile Selassie, which warranted Mogadishu's support for the WSLF. Kosygin, however, emphasised in return that the Kremlin gave Somalia arms to defend itself from imperialist states and not from its neighbours. He then said that the Somali military units should withdraw and immediately start peace talks with Ethiopia.<sup>730</sup> Siad replied that he was sincerely interested in finding a formula for a political settlement, but Mengistu appeared to him to be resistant. The Soviets' reaction to Siad's claim was that neither Mengistu, nor any future Ethiopian leadership, would ever consider finding a political solution, as long as regular Somali army units remained in Ethiopia.<sup>731</sup>

Importantly, on the second day of the talks the Party's chief ideologue, Mikhail Suslov, expressed in detail the Soviet Union's position on the national question, based on its rich experience. He said that the Somali side often used statements from Leninist philosophy, regarding the national question for justifying its line towards Ethiopia. Moreover, one of the key elements of this philosophy was that unity, and not division, formed the basis for the creation of the Soviet Union. This was the theoretical angle from which the Ethiopian question had to be understood, Suslov maintained. Kosygin, on the other hand, emphasised that the Soviet Union had given Somalia arms to defend itself from imperialist countries, not from the neighbouring states. He then said that the Somali military units should withdraw and immediately start peace talks with Ethiopia.<sup>732</sup>

Gradually the Somali president came to realise that he was losing the case before his hosts. Siad's bargaining power and flexibility in dealing with Moscow was undermined by Washington's reversal of its previously declared agreement in principle to provide military supplies to Mogadishu. The Somali President, therefore, at the Kremlin

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<sup>730</sup> A. Chilyashev, 'Otnosno sreshta na poslanitsite na sotsialisticheskite strani,' 10 September 1977, DAMVnR-RB, f. (y), o. 33, d. 181, p. 3795, s. 1, l. 28.

<sup>731</sup> Cable [US], 'Soviet-Somali relations: no military resupply,' 20 September 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2132, fo. 22.

<sup>732</sup> Chilyashev, 'Otnosno sreshta,' 1; 3.

was unable to use the argument that the West was offering support.<sup>733</sup> Somalia's leverage was further weakened as considerable caution was noted in the actions not only of the Western powers, but also of the reactionary Arab regimes of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. Despite incomplete information, it seemed that Arab caution led to episodic rather than systematic offers of material assistance.<sup>734</sup> Feeling the strain, once again, Siad proposed to the Kremlin that it take the lead in conducting negotiations between Somalia and Ethiopia. Being accustomed to Siad's rather frivolous treatment of Moscow's good offices, the Soviets understood that the Somali President was biding time. Siad's request for mediation highlighted his desire to negotiate while Ethiopian territories remained under occupation. This made the whole proposal unacceptable to the Soviets.<sup>735</sup>

### V. 5.3 The Kremlin toughens its stance towards Mogadishu

After Siad's visit, the Russians noticeably increased their criticism of Somalia's aggressive stance towards Ethiopia. Gromyko and Brezhnev called for peace based on the principle of territorial integrity.<sup>736</sup> In late September, Brezhnev became the first Soviet leader to comment publicly on the Somali-Ethiopian conflict. In a toast to the visiting President of Angola, Agostinho Neto, the CPSU Secretary-General described the Ogaden conflict as 'regrettable' and as hindering the liberation movement throughout the continent. While admitting that African borders were drawn by the old colonial powers, and were, as a result, often unfair, he argued that the territorial integrity of each state must be respected if the 'imperialist forces and their African accomplices' were to be prevented from attempting to destroy African unity. His comments, however, were

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<sup>733</sup> J. Darnton, 'Russians in Somalia: Foothold in Africa Suddenly Shaky,' *The New York Times*, 16 September 1977, 3.

<sup>734</sup> Memo [on the development of Ethiopian-Somali conflict], 7 September 1977, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 181, pr. 3795, ss. 4-5, ll. 38-9.

<sup>735</sup> A. Chilyashev, 'Otnosno sreshta,' 3.

<sup>736</sup> 'Soviet Tactics in the Horn of Africa,' NACP.

considerably softer and more balanced, compared to those of the Soviet media. Since the end of Siad's visit, the Soviet press treated Ethiopia more favourably and were more critical of Somalia.<sup>737</sup> From mid-August, the TASS' basic line highlighted the principle of territorial integrity, espoused by the OAU. Moscow appeared to be getting closer to giving its full support to Ethiopia.<sup>738</sup>

Reflecting the mood in Moscow, Soviet military deliveries to Addis Ababa saw substantial increase, and from the beginning of September, Israeli vessels observed the transportation of armoured vehicles across the Red Sea from Aden into Assab and Massawa.<sup>739</sup> As the Yugoslav Ambassador to Addis Ababa reported in early September, according to his Soviet counterpart, Moscow was prepared to provide full support to the Ethiopian revolution and its leadership, by enhancing the country's defence capability. Ratanov admitted that there were 70 experts in Ethiopia who were able to train as many as 2,500 Ethiopians. Moreover, Moscow was ready to send more specialists to assist the Ethiopian military in handling new technology, including MiG-21s and 23s, T-55 tanks. In effect, Anatoly Ratanov openly shared with his East European colleague that Moscow was already prepared to provide Addis Ababa with the most modern defensive and offensive weapons, not only to cover the country's present needs, but also to create a modern and powerful army.<sup>740</sup> A few days later, Ratanov confirmed the Soviet position he had outlined to Belgrade's envoy, Vujinovic. In an 'on the record' conversation with an American correspondent, he openly declared that the Soviet Union supported Ethiopia in its dispute with Somalia. In order to connect with the Soviet's cautious approach to the region's affairs, Vujinovic clarified that this did not mean that the Kremlin was abandoning Somalia, rather, that it gave priority to the success of the Ethiopian

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<sup>737</sup> NIDC, 30 September 1977, NACP, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030300010086-0.

<sup>738</sup> NIDC, 16 November 1977, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030400010056-2.

<sup>739</sup> Legum, 'Angola and the Horn,' 616.

<sup>740</sup> Cable, Addis Ababa to Belgrade, 2 September 1977, DAMSP-RS, f. PA, Etiopija 1977, fasc. 34, dos. 5, sig. 447810, s. 1.

revolution and the principle of territorial integrity,<sup>741</sup> which Moscow had begun favouring since mid-August, as the basis for a settlement.<sup>742</sup>

Opinions of Soviet Ambassadors in Addis Ababa and Mogadishu showed Moscow's trust in Mengistu's regime and disappointment in Siad Barre's regional policies. The Soviet Ambassador to Addis Ababa believed that, in this complex situation, the Derg seemed more organised, and restrained. Mengistu and the less radical member of the PMAC bridged their differences, aiming to unite the masses in the defence of the country and the revolution. There was no doubt that the mass of peasants and workers were on the side of the revolution.<sup>743</sup> Similarly, in the assessment of Ratanov's colleague in Mogadishu, Samsonov, the USSR was apparently moving close to cutting off all military aid to Somalia in the hope of curtailing Somali military activity in the Ogaden. Samsonov argued that Ethiopia's population, size, mineral wealth, agricultural base, and pledge to develop along socialist lines motivated the Soviet's growing commitment to the country. To the Russians, this made Ethiopia an important African state with a bright future ahead of it.<sup>744</sup>

As a result, in September, the Soviet ambassador to Mogadishu, Samsonov, noted that the Soviet Union ceased to provide Somalia with 'strategic armaments' and refused to deliver the military material Siad Barre required to carry out war against Ethiopia. In justifying this decision, the Russian Ambassador genuinely believed that Ethiopia offered greater hope for socialist development and served the Soviet Union's national interests better than Somalia.<sup>745</sup> Accordingly, on 19 October, Samsonov's colleague in Addis Ababa, Ratanov, disclosed that Moscow had 'officially and formally stopped arms supplies to Somalia.' Instead, he said that Moscow began providing 'defensive weapons'

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<sup>741</sup> NIDC, 6 September 1977, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030300010044-6.

<sup>742</sup> NIDC, 22 October 1977, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030400010016-6.

<sup>743</sup> Addis Ababa to Belgrade, 2 September 1977, DAMSP-RS, s. 2.

<sup>744</sup> NIDC, 21 September 1977, CREST, ESDN: CIA-RDP79T00975A030300010070-7.

<sup>745</sup> 'Soviet-Somali relations,' FCO 31/2132.

to the Ethiopian regime. This statement by Moscow's Ambassador was the first official acknowledgement that the Soviet Union had switched its support from Somalia to Ethiopia.<sup>746</sup>

Consequently, in an attempt to seize the moment, Mengistu embarked on an urgent trip to Moscow in late October, when he met Brezhnev and Gromyko. During the meeting, Mengistu informed Brezhnev in detail about the grave situation in Ethiopia, referring to the need to improve Ethiopia's defence under these circumstances, and requesting an increase in Moscow's military assistance.<sup>747</sup> The Kremlin had to choose which side to support. Taking into consideration that local warfare was against its interest, the Kremlin chose to help the victim, Ethiopia, while the aggressor, Somalia, was condemned.<sup>748</sup> Following this meeting, in early November, the Minister of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, Raul Castro, visited Moscow, accompanied by the same generals who later figured prominently in the Ethiopian campaign.<sup>749</sup> Although, we have no explicit information regarding Cuba's involvement in Moscow's decision, it seems plausible that, unlike previous Soviet-Cuban joint ventures in Angola, where Cuba took a pro-active role, the Ethiopian case was discussed and later co-ordinated between Moscow and Havana. The meticulous execution and the far-reaching military support, including the airlifting of vast amounts of military material and thousands of Cuban troops is consistent with this observation.

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<sup>746</sup> 'USSR cuts Somalia arms flow,' *Facts on File World News Digest*, 5 November 1977 [Accessed on 25 July 2010].

<sup>747</sup> SAPMO, J IV 2/202/583, in CWIHPB, 81-2.

<sup>748</sup> Puzyrev, *Torgovyĭ*, 38.

<sup>749</sup> Henze, *Layers of Time*, 301.

#### V. 5.4 Siad Barre expels the Russians

Siad responded to the above developments almost immediately on 13 November by denouncing the friendship treaty he held with Moscow. On the next day, at a rally, justifying his decision, he claimed that Moscow unilaterally cut off the supplies of defensive weapons, and all these actions in his eyes constituted a unilateral abrogation of the Treaty of 1974 and other agreements between the two countries. In addition, the Somali Government terminated the Soviet Union's rights to use any military facilities on Somali territory. All Soviet experts, military and civilian, were ordered to leave the country within a week, and the diplomatic staff of the Soviet embassy and other Soviet institutions in Mogadishu was to be reduced to the level of similar Somali missions in Moscow. Moreover, it was decided to terminate diplomatic relations with Cuba and all Cuban diplomats, embassy employees, and professionals were to leave the country within 48 hours.<sup>750</sup> According to the chief of the Third African department of the Soviet MFA, Vyacheslav Ustinov, the Somali termination of the treaty was a display of Mogadishu's chauvinism. Soviet efforts to influence Siad, were fruitless and Moscow expected that, after the abrogation, Somalia would receive the US\$400m in military aid, promised by Saudi Arabia.<sup>751</sup>

Nevertheless, Somalia's announcement was a serious psychological blow that was bound to weaken the Soviet position in the area. Until the Soviets began to move into Angola and Ethiopia, Somalia was Moscow's most valuable asset in sub-Saharan Africa. The Russians saw their presence there both as counter-balancing Western and Chinese influence and as an example of Soviet generosity to the continent. In the CIA's assessment, since 1972, the Kremlin had regarded Somalia as a replacement for Egypt in ensuring its

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<sup>750</sup> TASS, 'Zayavlenie prezidenta Somali,' 15 November 1977, GARF, f. 4459, f. 43, d. 18883, ll. 78-9.

<sup>751</sup> A. Karlov, 'Otnosno sreshtata na dr. Petar Mladenov s Ustinov V. A,' 24 November 1977, DAMvNR RB, s. 3, l. 69.

access to the Red Sea region and facilities at Berbera were aimed at expanding Soviet naval and political presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>752</sup> Moscow, therefore, faced a complete expulsion from the region. In the autumn of 1977, the deterioration of Ethiopia's internal situation provided the Kremlin with an additional opportunity to launch decisive measures to save the Ethiopian regime and preserve its position in the wider region.

## V. 6. The Red Terror

A growing internal power-struggle in Ethiopia further compromised the prospect for the survival of the Ethiopian revolution. Rumours of Soviet behind-the-scenes involvement in motivating Mengistu's violent approach to the regime's opponents began to circulate in the diplomatic community. It is too far-fetched, however, to assume there was direct Soviet influence. It seems that Mengistu was inspired by the Soviet revolution, which was understood by Moscow's diplomats. Consequently, realising that the Addis Ababa had to withstand attacks from both within the country and abroad, Moscow had finally to engage decisively in pursuit of its interest, by launching comprehensive military and logistic support for Mengistu's regime.

In parallel to Somali aggression, Ethiopia was riven by increased political disturbances that put an additional strain on the development of the country's revolutionary transformations. In the autumn of 1977, urban warfare broke out between the Derg and its opposition. The PMAC, with its Marxist intellectual allies, unleashed 'qay sheber' ('Red Terror'), which was not in accordance with the classical revolutionary pattern of enforcing a reluctant peasantry into collectives, or exterminating a social class, considered inimical to the revolution. It grew out of the leadership struggle and was used by the Derg against various civilian Marxist factions, such as the EPRP, the All-

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<sup>752</sup> NIDC, 16 November 1977, CREST.

Ethiopian Socialist Union, and the royalist Ethiopian Democratic Union. The Derg's opposition, in return, resorted to using force against the military government, launching what came to be known as 'nach sheber' ('White Terror').<sup>753</sup>

### V. 6.1 Soviet Bloc reactions to the Red Terror

In the eyes of Moscow's observers the leftist 'pseudo-revolutionaries' played into the hands of reactionary circles, trying to fight the Derg and other progressive groups and organisations.<sup>754</sup> Similarly, according to the Bulgarians, the Derg's opposition mainly revolved around the 'petty bourgeois-anarchist' left, led by the ranks of EPRP supporters, whose programme made abundant use of Marxist phraseology, mixed with trade unionist demands for universal suffrage, freedom of speech, civilian government, freedom of political organisation, and human rights. Importantly, however, it avoided any reference to the significance of the revolutionary transformation, undertaken in Ethiopia.<sup>755</sup>

Interestingly, while Mengistu had used violence even before he befriended the Soviets, some foreign observers concluded that the real brain behind his purge was the Soviet Ambassador Ratanov. According to a western observer in Addis Ababa, 'They [the Russians] have created a monster.'<sup>756</sup> It is plausible, that rather than directly advising the Ethiopian leader to use terror against his opponents, Mengistu seemed motivated by the Soviet revolutionary experience. In return, the Soviets regarded the events in Ethiopia as comprising the region's first 'genuine' revolution, a complex situation that derived not from a military regime or a 'vanguard party,' but 'from the people.' For that reason, the Soviets were reminded of their own March 1917 revolution with the removal of an

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<sup>753</sup> See D. and M. Ottaway, *Afrocommunism* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1981), 152ff and Teshale Tibebe, 'Modernity, Eurocentrism,' 355.

<sup>754</sup> Korovikov, *Éfiopiya*, 103-5.

<sup>755</sup> 'Otnosno vūtneshnopoliticheskoto polozhenie i vūnshnata politika na Etiopiya,' 15 December 1976, ANRS, f.9, d. 2843, ch. II, s. 4, l. 65.

<sup>756</sup> J. Pringle, 'Counterattack in the Horn; Ethiopia: The Red Terror,' *Newsweek*, 20 February 1978, 40.

autocratic emperor, landed gentry and strong Christian Church by low ranking military and the ‘masses.’ Similarly, as in the Soviet case, enemies surrounded the Ethiopian Revolution, and its leaders launched Red Terror against their adversaries.<sup>757</sup> In retaliation, ‘[r]eactionary elements,’ tried ‘to introduce an overt military dictatorship and abandon the political education of the masses and the creation of a political organization of the working people and a vanguard workers part.’<sup>758</sup> Ethiopia’s worsened internal situation caused serious regional repercussions. The all-out support the Russians launched at the end of November was aimed at urgently providing men and equipment to Addis Ababa, needed to boost combat capability and Ethiopian morale.

#### V. 7. The Soviet-Cuban military support for Mengistu

Finally, in November the Kremlin launched what was later seen as one of the largest military resupply missions in Soviet history. A crucial aspect of this operation was the involvement of more than 10,000 Cuban troops, who fought side-by-side with Ethiopian soldiers, commanded by high-ranking Soviet generals. Unlike its leading role in Angola, in the Horn, Havana acted in close co-ordination with Moscow. There were differences, however, within the Soviet leadership as to how to manage the situation. Moscow’s military circles, favoured a more aggressive approach towards Somalia, considering a counterattack on Somalia in the spring of 1978. The Soviet civilian leadership, on the other hand, dismissed this plan, as the Soviet-Cuban troops’ entry into Somali territory was expected to spur widespread international disagreement, and, as a result, might have further exacerbated Soviet-American relations. Despite the fact that Eritrea, unlike the Ogaden problem, was an internal issue for Ethiopia, after initial hesitation, the Soviet and

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<sup>757</sup> A. Yodfat, ‘The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa, Part Three,’ *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 2 (1980): 70.

<sup>758</sup> *Pravda*, 21 November 1977, cited in Yodfat, ‘The Soviet Union,’ 71.

Cuban troops came to rescue Mengistu's regime once again. Although we lack details on policy deliberations in Moscow, it appears that in the Eritrean case the military took a more pro-active stance. As a result, towards the end of 1978, Moscow helped Addis Ababa in its campaign against the Eritrean secessionists, which resulted in a resounding victory for the Ethiopian army in December.

### V. 7.1 The Launch of the Airlift

Immediately after the denouncement of the friendship treaty with Somalia, in Sofia, on 15 November, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Petar Mladenov, received the Chief of the MFA's Third African Department. According to him the Ethiopian army helped by Soviet and Cuban instructors, began the appropriation of the new Soviet aid weapons that were already arriving in great quantities.<sup>759</sup> Accordingly, around that time, in Addis Ababa, a group of high-ranking Soviet Army officers arrived, headed by the First Deputy Commander of the Ground Forces, General Vladimir Petrov, and General-Major Pyotr Golitsyn. The delegation embarked on a fact-finding mission with the aim of assisting in the preparation of the Ethiopian defence against the invading Somali army. On 18 November, the Soviet Generals met with the Ethiopian leadership, led by a member of the PMAC Major Adis Tedla and the Defence Minister.<sup>760</sup>

A week later, on the night of 26 November, exceptionally heavy air traffic was registered simultaneously by American spy satellites, surveillance ships of the Sixth and Seventh fleets in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, as well as from American, Pakistani, Iranian, Turkish, Greek, Israeli, and Egyptian radar stations. It took almost a week to connect the separate pieces of information and to create an intelligible picture.

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<sup>759</sup> Memcon, Mladenov - Ustinov, 24 November 1977, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 125, pr. 2555, s. 2, l. 68.

<sup>760</sup> Puzyrev, *Torgovyř*, 39. See also P. Golitsyn, 'Tret'a moya vořna,' *Voенno-istoricheskiř Zhurnal* 3 (1994): 54-5.

Military observers agreed that some 225 air transports, constituting about 15 per cent of Russia's transport fleet were despatched concurrently along seven different routes, heading for three destinations: Addis Ababa, Aden, and Maputo. For three weeks, big Antonov planes were launched continuously from different bases, often at intervals of only 15 or 20 minutes. In step with the airlift, a large number of Soviet and east European cargo ships, bearing military equipment, were despatched from Black Sea bases for Ethiopia.<sup>761</sup> As a result, in three weeks, Moscow delivered 600 infantry fighting vehicles, 60 MiG-21, 2 squadrons of MiG-23, a large number of tanks T-54, and about 400 pieces of artillery. During the airlift, about 50 Soviet warships passed through the Bosphorus and the Suez Canal with arms for Ethiopia.<sup>762</sup> This prompted Western experts to compare the scale of the operation to previous Soviet arms deliveries to Egypt and Syria in the 1973 Middle East War.

The most dramatic move, however, came in the second week of the military operation, when for the first time the Kremlin drew on the military stockpiles, built up behind the Urals, and used them for intervention in the Middle East and Africa. Accordingly, the Soviet re-supply mission served as a cover for a complex military exercise, in which the Russians tested their capacity for rapid deployment of men and equipment in the Middle East and Africa.<sup>763</sup> The success and scale of the operation were deeply disquieting for the West.<sup>764</sup>

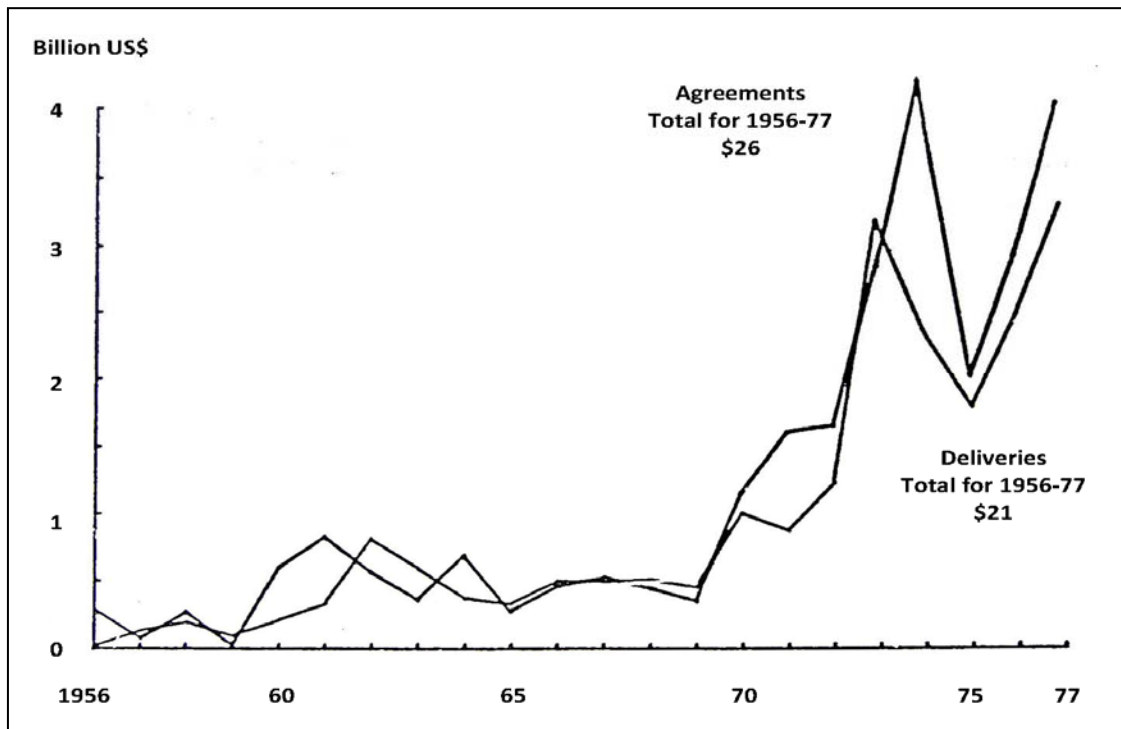
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<sup>761</sup> Foreign Report, 'Russia's Airlift: Warning to the West,' 21 December 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2107, fo. 80.

<sup>762</sup> In comparison, between 1964 and 1977 the Soviet Union transferred to Somalia 250 tanks, 350 armoured personnel carriers, 79 MIG fighter-type, 2 anti-submarine ships, 10 patrol boats. See A. Malahova, 'Russkie na Afrikanskom Roge,' *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, no. 43 (1997).

<sup>763</sup> For details, see figure 1.

<sup>764</sup> Foreign Report, 'Russia's Airlift,' FCO 31/2107.



**Fig. 1:** Soviet military agreements and deliveries to the LDCs<sup>765</sup>

In addition, the Soviets also played a crucial logistic role by transporting thousands of Cuban troops to Ethiopia. In January 1978, the number of Cuban soldiers, who responded to the Fidel Castro's call to help the endangered revolution in Ethiopia reached 20,000.<sup>766</sup> At the end of January, the vast quantities of Soviet weapons, operated by the joint Cuban-Ethiopian forces launched an offensive against the invading Somali forces, defeating them in the north. In the subsequent fighting, the Somali government was forced to withdraw all of its troops from the Ogaden.<sup>767</sup> On 5 March, the Ethiopian Eastern Highlands were declared wholly liberated,<sup>768</sup> and on 9 March, Siad announced the unilateral withdrawal of Somali troops. This was the first time he had ever admitted that the Somali army was fighting in the area.<sup>769</sup>

<sup>765</sup> Office of Economic Research, 'Soviet-LDC Arms Transfer Policies,' NACP, RG263, Directorate of Intelligence, b. 19, NN3-263-01-005, f. 22578 – Soviet Policies on Restraint of Arms Sales to the Third World, ERM 78-10232.

<sup>766</sup> Puzyrev, *Torgov'yi*, 39-40.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-1.

<sup>768</sup> Henze, *Layers of Time*, 303.

<sup>769</sup> See Legum, 'Angola and the Horn,' 625.

## V. 7.2 The Eritrean dilemma

The issue of how to tackle Ethiopia's territorial ambitions presented a serious matter for discussion between the CPSU Politburo, the Military, and the MFA. In a clear example of military influence in Moscow's foreign affairs, as General Chaplygin remembers, in March 1978, the Soviet army leaders thought about advancing into and occupying Somali territory, but the Politburo rejected this proposal, considering that it would further strain Moscow's relations with the West.<sup>770</sup> Later, similar considerations arose regarding the Eritrean question. According to the head of the Party's International Department, Boris Ponomarev, the CPSU defended the opinion that Ethiopia's position on the Eritrean question was different from its relationship with Somalia.<sup>771</sup> To the Soviet civilian leadership, the Eritrean struggle was a national issue and was, therefore, to be addressed by political means within a single state without external interference. The USSR advised Mengistu to intensify political work among the Eritrean population. Similarly, in MFA's opinion, the Eritrean movement was a serious threat to the Ethiopian regime. Soviet specialists on Africa believed that if Mengistu had succeeded in achieving a quick victory over the province, its liberation struggle might have turned into a prolonged and vicious guerrilla war that would drain the Ethiopian economy.<sup>772</sup> Despite this initial disagreement, Ethiopia was helped by its new allies and managed to reverse the tide in Eritrea, thus securing effective control over the rebellious northern province.

Throughout its involvement in the Horn, Moscow had showed a rather flexible approach to Eritrea's right to self-determination. While in the early 1960s, the Russians tacitly supported the Eritreans as a national liberation movement. However, because of

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<sup>770</sup> Interview with General Pyotr Chaplygin, Transcript to the CNN Cold War Series, Episode 17: Good Guys, Bad Guys, 1967-1978, 17 [Accessed online on 7 July 2010].

<sup>771</sup> Memcon, Markovski - Ponomarev, 10 February 1978 (dated 13 February 1978), SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/ 127, transl. C. Ostermann in CWIHPB, 84.

<sup>772</sup> 'Záznam z jednání na MID SSSR o problematice Etiopie,' 21 August 1978, NAČR, sv. 1978 Vnitřní Politika Etiopie, ss. 3-4.

regime change in Addis Ababa, Moscow inevitably altered its attitude towards the rebellion. When the central government was progressive, self-determination was only permissible to a certain extent. The Soviet Union, therefore, supported the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and agreed with the Derg's nationalities policy, announced in May 1976, which accounted for some degree of autonomy in provinces like Eritrea, and even pluralism 'as long as all the parties [were] progressive.'<sup>773</sup> The 1975 Addis Ababa plan to grant autonomy and the right to self-determination to the provinces was seriously hampered by many pressing problems, ranging from internal opposition from both left and right and to the collapse of the economy.<sup>774</sup>

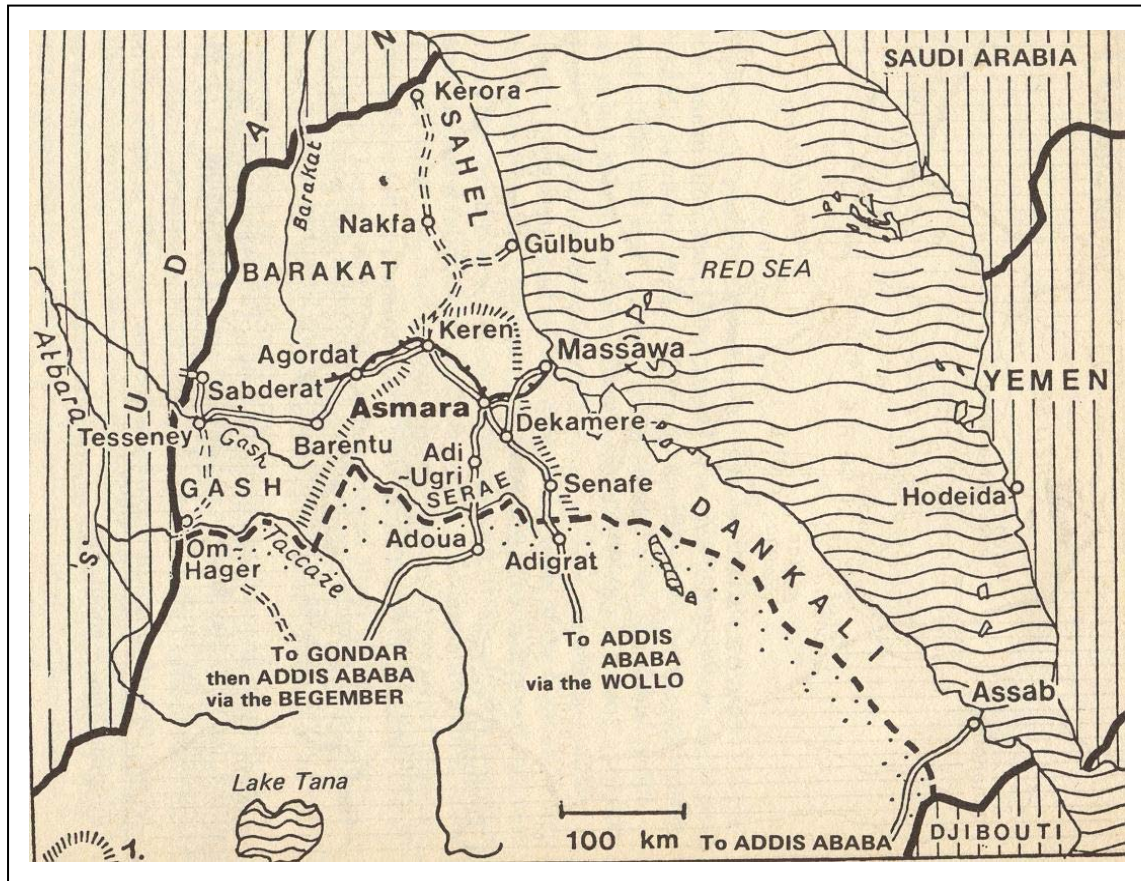
Later, when the situation in Ethiopia, after the Ogaden war, continued to deteriorate, thanks to EPLF's activities in the province, the threat to Mengistu's regime remained. In December 1978, 100,000 Eritreans were reported to have fled into the mountains after Ethiopian forces recaptured Keren, which was the site of the Eritrean rebels' first major victory back in mid-1977 and had functioned as their shadow capital. To the Ethiopian regime, the re-capture of Keren signified 'the end of the 17-year-old secessionist dream in Eritrea.'<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Teleletter, Mallaby to Ewans, 20 June 1977, TNA, FCO 31/2081, fo. 120; For an identical assessment of the evolution of Soviet attitudes towards the Eritrean question see Memcon, Markovski – Ratanov, 31 October 1977, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 63, pr. 1164, ss. 3-4, ll. 59-60.

<sup>774</sup> Memcon, Holmes-Mironov, 1 March 1978, TNA, FCO28/3482, fo. 93.

<sup>775</sup> J. Darnton, 'Ethiopia's victory also proves to be Russia's gain,' *The New York Times*, 17 December 1978, E3.



**Map 6:** Eritrea<sup>776</sup>

While it appears that the Soviet military might have had the upper hand in influencing the Kremlin's decision to aid Mengistu in Eritrea, as early as 1978, the Soviet Foreign Ministry expressed its disappointment at Mengistu's handling of the Eritrean issue. The tradition of 'Amharic chauvinism,' inherited from Ethiopia's Imperial past, proved to the Soviet diplomatic service extremely difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, it was hard for Moscow to blame the Ethiopian government entirely as the new regime was young and inexperienced in tackling such complex problems.<sup>777</sup> As a result, MFA's Horn specialists noted that, after the Ogaden victory, stronger nationalist sentiments within the Derg pressed

<sup>776</sup> Map source: Lefort, *Ethiopia*, xi.

<sup>777</sup> Holmes-Mironov.

for an armed solution to the Eritrean question.<sup>778</sup> This showed to Soviet experts that the training of the 'right cadres' was needed to implement the correct course for the provision of autonomy to Eritrea and other rebelling provinces such as Tigray, for example. Mironov was convinced that the Ethiopian government would find the right solutions in time, but then there were too many other problems for the root causes of nationalism and separatism to be tackled. Moscow continued to advise Addis Ababa, as it had done with Mogadishu before, that territorial issues should be solved by peaceful means.<sup>779</sup>

### V. 7.3 The case of Cuban involvement in the Horn

According to Castro, the Ogaden campaign was the only operation 'conducted in full agreement with the Soviets.'<sup>780</sup> Moscow relied on Cuban forces extensively, and this led to charges in the West that Cuba was acting as a mere Soviet proxy. Indeed, without Soviet logistical support, Havana could not have despatched the large numbers of troops to Ethiopia as promptly as it did. Once the Ogaden war was over, Cuba refused to go along with Moscow in fighting against Eritrean rebels - an action which indicated that, while Cuba supported Soviet aims in the Horn and Red Sea region at large, it had certain reservations.<sup>781</sup> In this regard, Castro's influence on Soviet policy in Ethiopia remains unappreciated by Western observers. As a prominent leader of the Third World Nonaligned Movement, Castro acquired substantial credibility with Soviet leaders and his personal influence and legitimacy probably led the Soviets to become more deeply involved in the Ethiopian Revolution. A former Ethiopian Foreign Minister claimed that '[t]he Soviets

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<sup>778</sup> 'MID SSSR o problematice Etiopie,' 1.

<sup>779</sup> Holmes-Mironov.

<sup>780</sup> Interview with Fidel Castro, Transcript to the CNN Cold War Series, Episode 17: Good Guys, Bad Guys, 1967-1978, 17 [Accessed online on 7 July 2010].

<sup>781</sup> S. Makinda, *Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 209.

listened to Castro, because he had tremendous credibility as a leader in the Third World.’ Accordingly, Cuba’s decision to send troops to Ethiopia was welcomed by the Soviets.<sup>782</sup>

Both countries acted in close consultation throughout the operation — in contrast to Angola, where Castro authorised the despatch of troops despite Moscow’s initial objections. On 27 November, Brezhnev expressed to Castro the Kremlin’s ‘complete agreement with [his] policy,’ showing the Soviet leadership’s contention that Moscow’s ‘assessment of events in Ethiopia coincides with Havana’s,’ thanking him sincerely for his ‘timely decision to extend internationalist assistance to Socialist Ethiopia.’ According to Cuban intelligence, Havana intervened in Addis Ababa because it believed that, in early March 1977, the revolutionary measures adopted by Addis Ababa were the most progressive undertaken by ‘any underdeveloped country since the triumph of the Cuban revolution.’<sup>783</sup> The Cuban leader believed that the Ethiopian revolution had enormous importance for Africa, as well.<sup>784</sup> Thus, by accepting the strength of Castro’s conviction, one can conclude not only that he was not encouraged by the Soviets, but also that it was Moscow’s military and logistical assistance that made it possible for him to follow the course he wanted to take.<sup>785</sup> Despite the dearth of information, however, it is plausible that, realising Castro’s appeal to revolutionary leaders in the Third World, pro-active circles in Soviet military and civilian leadership might have encouraged his actions in the Horn.

In the case of Ethiopia, it seems acceptable that, in early 1977, Castro’s authority and revolutionary charisma were aimed at bringing Siad and Mengistu to the negotiation table. The fact that, immediately after the unsuccessful attempt at mediation, he visited Berlin and Moscow, suggests that he might have acted as a special envoy for the socialist

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<sup>782</sup> Interview with Goshu Wolde, Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, 1983-1986, in R. Duncan, ‘Cuba’s Impact on Soviet Behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa from Brezhnev to Gorbachev,’ in *Soviet Policy in Africa*, ed. G. Breslauer, 186.

<sup>783</sup> P. Gleijeses, ‘Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975–1988,’ *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 111.

<sup>784</sup> Fidel Castro cited by Vivó, *Ethiopia’s Revolution*.

<sup>785</sup> Gleijeses, ‘Moscow’s Proxy?’ 143.

commonwealth. His authoritative statement in support of Mengistu and criticism of Siad had a resounding effect on Moscow and East European Party leaders. Importantly, the assessment of General Atanas Semerdzhiev, the then Chief of Staff of the Bulgarian Army, indirectly confirms this assessment, by stressing the Havana leader's revolutionary credentials. In addition, the Cubans, according to General Semerdzhiev, fought in Angola, Ethiopia, and elsewhere as volunteers, not mercenaries. They felt they were sons and daughters not only of their homeland, but also of Africa and Latin America; they felt morally obliged to help those struggling for freedom and independence.<sup>786</sup> In the final analysis, therefore, it is an over-simplification to regard Havana as a mere proxy to the Soviet Union in Ethiopia. Cubans fought side-by-side with Ethiopian troops and, while it is understood that overall command was reserved for the Soviet generals, undoubtedly Cuba's role prior to the military campaign and following it sets it apart as a viable Soviet and Bloc partner as it provided urgent assistance to a fellow revolutionary in the spirit and the principles of socialist internationalism.

## V. 8. Conclusion

The Kremlin's involvement in Ethiopia shows that it is almost impossible to separate the Narkomindel and the Comintern line in Soviet foreign policy. In the case of Ethiopia, it appeared that geopolitics and ideology played an integral role in motivating Soviet and her allies' conduct. The importance of *realpolitik* considerations was amplified by the presence of notable developments on the ideological front in the Horn. On the other hand, however, the Soviet Union seemed to have set limits to local engagement, so that it would not affect its conduct in other areas. This mainly reflected Moscow's concerns about relations with Washington. It is important to note that, instead of seeing the East as initiators of the

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<sup>786</sup> A. Semerdzhiev, *Prezhivianoto ne podlezhi na obzhalvane*, (Sofia: Trud, 2004), 188-9.

significant deepening in Ethiopian-Bloc relations, Western sources reported that the desire for solidarity with the socialist states came mainly from Ethiopia itself and not from the Soviet Union and her East European allies.<sup>787</sup> The culmination of these contacts was the combined Soviet-Ethiopian-Cuban military effort that led to a resounding victory for Addis Ababa in the Ogaden war, rebutting the Somali threat in March 1978.

Right from the end of 1976, Mengistu began heralding the Ethiopian Revolution as part of a global socialist movement. In his pleas to the Soviet Bloc, he wished to emphasise that, if the revolution succeeded, it would contribute to the prosperity of the socialist international, and Ethiopia would set an example for many other African countries, which might eventually follow its experience in the building of socialism.<sup>788</sup> The fact that Moscow and its Bloc allies provided massive material support to Ethiopia is a clear demonstration of their belief in Mengistu's claims.<sup>789</sup> In addition, Ethiopia's geopolitical significance – her size, population, location, and regional standing as host of the OAU – further motivated the rivalry between the superpowers, raising the stakes for each of the protagonists. The White House wished to extend further financial and military assistance in order to maintain earlier acquired positions in an attempt to suffocate the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>790</sup> The Soviets believed that Ethiopia deserved support for its socialist development, which attracted considerable Western interest aimed at retaining control over this strategic part of Africa at Soviet expense.<sup>791</sup> The Bloc States, vowing to work together for the strengthening of the socialist commonwealth against the forces of imperialism, saw the successes of the international communist movement. Ethiopian

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<sup>787</sup> TASS, 'Ob Otnosheniyakh mezhdú Éfiopieĭ i Sovetskim Soyuzom,' 2 May 1977, GARF, f. 4459, op. 43, d. 18881, l. 27.

<sup>788</sup> Memo on PMAC's request for military arms, Tsankov to Mladenov, 18 October 1976, TsDA, f.1, op.64, a.e. 492, 5-BP, ss. 18-19.

<sup>789</sup> Mádra, 'Zpráva,' 4.

<sup>790</sup> See 'Prijem,' AJ, 6.

<sup>791</sup> Mádra, 4.

Revolution, which was part of it, as ‘closely linked to the increase in Soviet power and international prestige, and persistent foreign policy of the CPSU.’<sup>792</sup>

Soviet involvement in Ethiopia can be seen as a continuation of the engagement in Angola three years earlier. In East European assessments, the Kremlin commitment in Angola and Mozambique helped the USSR gain the status of a global power. The military support provided to Ethiopia was thus perceived as an effort to strengthen this status.<sup>793</sup> As London admitted, there was no easy analogy between Soviet conduct in Angola and Ethiopia. In the latter case, the Kremlin helped a government, which was a member of the UN and recognised by the West, to maintain its own territorial integrity. In this sense, the Soviets came to play a stabilising role.<sup>794</sup> Moreover, in support of this claim, after successfully warding off the Somali attacks, in agreement with its previous gradualist approach in the region, the USSR showed restraint and rejected the suggestions of the Soviet military to counter-attack Somalia. Moscow feared that by engaging in a campaign against Mogadishu, it might lose the moral high ground, obtained by defending a victim of aggression, and, as a result, antagonise the West. In its actions, weighing the geostrategic gains in Ethiopia, against the paramount interest of continuing the policy of détente with the United States, the Soviet Union aimed not to stretch the limits of American tolerance in the region.<sup>795</sup> This clearly demonstrates the intertwining of regional and global considerations in the Kremlin’s local activism. As events unfolded, it became clear that Moscow had entered a local zero-sum game. With its all-out support for Ethiopia, the Soviet Union sacrificed its investment in facilities on the Somali Indian Ocean shores.

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<sup>792</sup> ‘Süvmestno komyunike za ofitsialnoto priyatelsko poseshenie na partiino-dürzhavnata delegatsia na Germanskata Demokraticzna Republika v Narodna Republika Bülğariya,’ DAMVnR, 14 September 1977, f. Ya., op. 33, d. 41, pr. 737, s. 15, l. 34.

<sup>793</sup> ‘Neke osnovne karakteristike spoljne politike SSSR u najnovijem periodu,’ 7 February 1977, AJ, f. 507, A. CK SKJ, IX, 119/III-98, s. 15.

<sup>794</sup> Letter, Crowe to Mansfield, 13 January 1978, TNA, FCO28/3480, fo. 15.

<sup>795</sup> ‘Neke osnovne karakteristike,’ 15.

Paradoxically, ideological considerations, while triggering the Soviet support for Mengistu, later in the 1980s became one of the prime issues between Moscow and Addis Ababa. The first manifestation of discord between the Soviet Union and her newest local ally was Mengistu regime's stubborn position regarding the Eritrean issue. This provoked the Soviet leadership, immediately after the Ogaden victory, to admit its disappointment that, in Addis Ababa, nationalist sentiments were taking higher priorities than socialist transformations. This observation became even more pertinent throughout the 1980s, when Moscow was at odds with Addis Ababa over its inability to achieve substantial progress in building a socialist society, which manifested in widespread poverty and a lack of clarity for the establishment of the political structures of the socialist state. Instead, the Regime concentrated its efforts on the war in Eritrea and on an internecine struggle for power, which further harmed its economic prospects; about which the Kremlin warned Mengistu immediately after the victory over Somalia.

## Chapter Six

### **On the road to withdrawal:**

December 1978 – March 1991

#### VI. 1. Introduction

The Ogaden war was vitally important to the regimes in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia. To the Ethiopian leadership, still inexperienced and torn by internal political strife, the victory over Somalia provided a chance for the consolidation of Mengistu's place at the top. To Siad Barre, however, it triggered a protracted struggle for survival by intensifying clan-based loyalties, which eventually came to replace national interests. The pervading feature of both regimes during the 1980s, however, was the abuse of political power, resulting in an appalling human rights record, which totally alienated the regimes from the people, causing, in both states, a politico-military crisis by the end of the decade. Additionally, on the international scene, the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a renewal of Soviet-American competition for influence over Third World regions that were deemed to have strategic value in the bi-polar world order.

The advent of the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, the deepening economic crisis in the Soviet Union, and Moscow's disappointment in the economic and socio-political conditions in the less developed states of socialist orientation, prompted the Kremlin to engage in a radical turn in its foreign policy. This turn was marked by de-ideologisation and rapprochement with its erstwhile enemy - the United States - which had resounding repercussions in the superpowers' conduct in Africa. Both the Soviet Union and the United States launched cooperative efforts to bring old regional conflicts,

such as those in Angola and Ethiopia, to an end, and gradually reduce their arms supplies to conflicting parties.

In the case of Ethiopia, Moscow showed a marked shift from security concerns to preoccupation with the country's deteriorating domestic situation. The Soviets became increasingly critical towards Mengistu's nationalist tendencies and the lack of economic growth. Despite this, the Kremlin continued to honour previous military agreements in Ethiopia. This suggested some potential inertia inherited from the old thinking, where a radical change of the Soviet Union's position would be seen as a betrayal to long-standing local allies. Nevertheless, Moscow's reluctance to sanction new deliveries to Ethiopia clearly demonstrated Soviet resolve to implement the drastic foreign policy reforms of the new thinking. Towards the end of the 1980s, as Mengistu's leadership looked increasingly vulnerable, the Kremlin concluded that the continuation of military supplies to Addis Ababa was unlikely to strengthen it. At the same time, Moscow encouraged Mengistu to seek Western help. America's attitude was in accord with the Soviet line of seeking to find a peaceful solution to the local conflict. The regime lost its external material support.

While the Cold War did not cause the conflicts in the Horn, Somalia and Ethiopia found themselves in a position to exploit superpower rivalry to their own advantage. At the end of the 1980s, the diminution in the tensions of the Second Cold War, which coincided with Mogadishu's defeat in the North, gave rise to growing international criticism of Siad's domestic policies. Similarly, the decline in the Soviet's international activism and the thaw in Cold War rivalry had a number of implications for the domestic and international politics of Ethiopia. In the final analysis, the combination of local grievances and the changes on the global scene proved the decisive factor that led to Mengistu's and Siad's demise.

## VI. 2. Moscow and Washington en route to the Second Cold War

Back in 1978, the massive Soviet-Cuban operation in Ethiopia played a decisive part in worsening the relations between Moscow and Washington, as they began to speculate about the motivations behind their respective opponent's African activism. Within the Carter Administration, however, at the beginning of 1978, serious disagreements had broken out over how to interpret Soviet and Cuban actions in Africa. Carter's National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, became increasingly convinced that Soviet actions were part of a well-defined strategy. He argued that Soviet behaviour was incompatible with Washington's policy of balancing competition with cooperation. Brzezinski concluded that the Soviets were pursuing a strategy of indirect expansionism, while still seeking to fashion a détente relationship with the US. This strategy would allow the Kremlin to achieve its principal foreign policy objectives, namely concluding 'a favourable SALT treaty,' a 'flexible and one-sided détente,' and a 'regional condominium in the Middle East'.<sup>796</sup> The Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, on the other hand, dismissed the notion that Soviet actions in Africa were part of a grand Soviet plan, but rather saw them as attempts to exploit targets of opportunity. He felt pragmatism was required from the White House in dealing with those problems in their local context, where they had their roots.<sup>797</sup>

The then Soviet envoy to Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, was fairly familiar with the sentiments of the Kremlin leadership concerning the developments in North-Eastern Africa. In his opinion, Vance was right in the sense that the Kremlin had no far-reaching global plans in the region. Having suffered no serious international complications because of its interference in Angola, Moscow had no scruples about escalating its

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<sup>796</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 187.

<sup>797</sup> C. Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 84.

activities in other Third World countries.<sup>798</sup> Additionally, Karen Brutents, who then served as deputy head of the International Department of the CPSU CC, dismissed the talk about Soviet African strategy. Brutents also attributed the perceptions of such a 'strategy' more or less to the desire to 'demonise' the enemy, over-rationalise his actions, according state leadership greater intellectual capacity than it possessed. Nevertheless, he recalled only one instance in which the need of long-term designs for Africa was mentioned. In April 1977, in a meeting with SED's leader Erich Honecker, Fidel Castro reportedly insisted on the need for 'an integrated strategy for the entire African continent.'<sup>799</sup> Still, his call fell on deaf ears.<sup>800</sup> Lastly, another key Moscow player, the Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, admitted that Moscow did not intend to wage a struggle for achieving predominant influence in Africa.

Moreover, as it turned out, the Kremlin underestimated the importance Washington gave to Moscow's military excursions in Africa.<sup>801</sup> Arguably, this led to the demise of the superpower détente. At the top executive level, while Brezhnev and Gromyko placed better relations with the United States far above all regional conflicts, they never thought that Soviet activism in Africa would jeopardise the SALT II process.<sup>802</sup> When the CPSU General Secretary, Brezhnev, suffered his first cardiac arrest in 1975, demoralisation increased within the state apparatus. Top Party functionaries realised that Brezhnev was no longer in full control of the situation and everyone arranged things as they saw fit. As a result, Soviet government structure began to resemble that of an orange with its individual segments independent from each other.<sup>803</sup> First, there were political tensions between the Party and the Soviet military at the

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<sup>798</sup> A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 403-4.

<sup>799</sup> See for more detail on Castro-Honecker's meeting, p. 221.

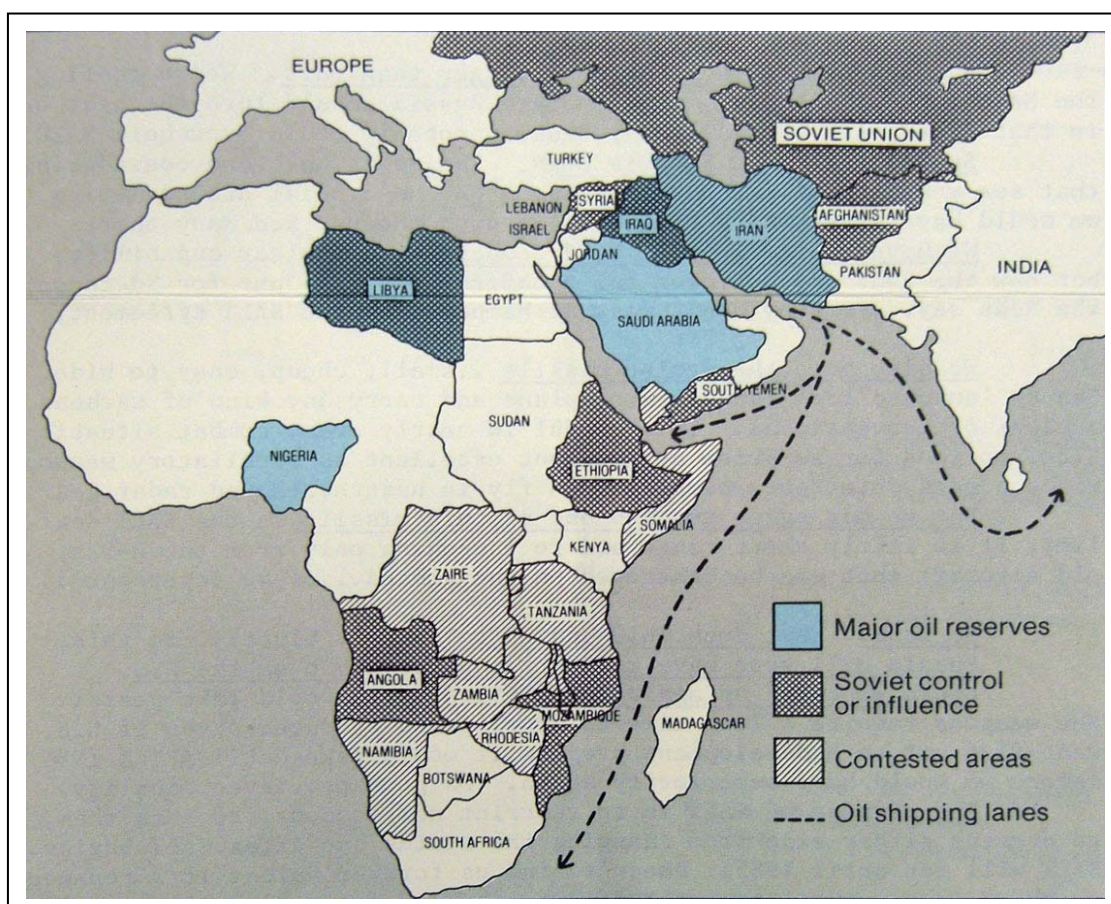
<sup>800</sup> K. Brutents, *Tridtsat' let na Staroi Ploshchadi* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 1998), 213.

<sup>801</sup> S. Akhromeev and G. Kornienko, *Glazami Marshala i Diplomata* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 1992), 23-4.

<sup>802</sup> Dobrynin, *Pocantico Hills*, 107.

<sup>803</sup> Interview with Nikolai Leonov, 23 September 1998, *Estudios Públicos* 73 (1999): 25-6.

Defence Ministry.<sup>804</sup> Secondly, the MFA was, at times, at odds with the ID about the latter's advocacy of a forceful Soviet presence in the Third World.<sup>805</sup> Arguably, these bureaucratic cleavages formed one of the most salient reasons for the disconnection between Moscow's Third World policy and its relations with Washington.<sup>806</sup> It manifested itself in the Kremlin top leadership's underestimation of the importance given by the White House to regional conflicts for the continuation of superpower dialogue during the second half of the 1970s.



**Map 7:** Soviet influence in the Middle East and Africa in the late 1970s<sup>807</sup>

<sup>804</sup> R. Kolkowicz, *Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Princeton: PUP, 1967), 11.

<sup>805</sup> Kramer, 'The Role of the CPSU International Department,' 431.

<sup>806</sup> Bessmertnykh, *Pocantico Hills*, 108.

<sup>807</sup> Map source: A Special Kiplinger Report, 'US-Russian Relations... Where They're Headed,' 1 December 1978, LoC, MD, The Papers of William E. Odom, b. 2, National Security Affairs Military Assistant, f. 2, Chronological File: 1978 Nov-Dec.

## VI. 2.1 Soviet-US competition in the Indian Ocean in the early 1980s

Nevertheless, in the late 1970s, the Soviet involvement in the Horn, together with growing American concern over the security of oil supplies precipitated an increase in superpower tensions in the region. The importance of the Ethiopian-Somali conflict's proximity to oil production areas and shipment routes has not been ignored by Washington, which had been making contingency plans for a rapid response to possible threats to oil supplies.<sup>808</sup> Yuri Velikanov, Soviet diplomat in the Seychelles in the 1980s acknowledged that Moscow had its own strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean. Still, he rejected the theory that the Kremlin intended to threaten the oil routes, so vital for Western economies. The Soviet Union, in his assessment, was not aiming at using Ethiopia as a base from which to invade or subvert the countries of the Gulf and the Middle East.<sup>809</sup>

The rationale that prompted the Kremlin to bring warships to the Indian Ocean in large numbers was to secure the Soviet Union's maritime and fishing areas. As the Soviet Union developed its maritime and finishing fleets, traffic between Vladivostok and the Black Sea ports increased and formed one of the country's most important naval highways.<sup>810</sup> For that reason, Moscow developed a naval base on the largest Ethiopian-controlled Island in the Dahlak Archipelago in the Red Sea, near the town of Massawa. Unlike the huge investment at Berbera, in Dahlak, the Soviets were cautious not to risk too much. Accordingly, the Soviet facilities there were limited to mobile docks and pre-fabricated structures that had been salvaged from Somalia when Siad Barre expelled the Moscow's specialists in November 1977.<sup>811</sup> While it was equipped with facilities and communications of the Soviet Navy,<sup>812</sup> it was not a fully-fledged military base similar to the one built by Washington on Diego Garcia. Its purpose was to offer technical support for

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<sup>808</sup> R. Burt, 'If war in the Horn is over, superpower tension is not,' *The New York Times*, 12 March 1978, E3.

<sup>809</sup> M. Kaufman, 'Ports and Oil Spur Naval Buildup by US and Soviet,' *New York Times*, 20 April 1981, A12.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Dawit, *Red Tears*, 104.

<sup>812</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 282.

the Soviet squadron in the Indian Ocean by providing spare parts and a large concrete floating dock for ship repair, engineering and technical personnel and a small guard unit.<sup>813</sup>

Interestingly, another point raised by Velikanov was not widely circulated amongst Western sources. The Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean was also ‘a matter of national defence.’ American missiles from submarines despatched to the ocean were potentially able reach any part of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the development of the US military base on Diego Garcia further contributed to the sharpening of Soviet suspicion of America’s intention in the wider-region.<sup>814</sup> Consequently, as the Russians became more emboldened in their Third World military excursions, Washington overreacted.<sup>815</sup> That overreaction, for the Americans, eventually derailed SALT, with ‘the final nail in the coffin’ being the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979. In brief, under-reaction, following Soviet-Cuban operation in the Ogaden, ‘bred overreaction,’ following Afghanistan, that gave a new-lease of life to superpower competition in the 1980s. In Brzezinski’s words, the ‘SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.’<sup>816</sup> Since the suspension of the SALT process, the Russians became particularly concerned about submarine-launched missiles. In diplomatic circles the Soviet entry into the Indian Ocean was seen as a complicated move, intended to secure a resumption of arms talks.<sup>817</sup>

### VI. 3. Superpower realignment in the Horn

Following its expulsion from Ethiopia, prompted by the need to obtain basing rights in the vicinity of the oil producing Gulf States, Washington opted for an embedding

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<sup>813</sup> L. Mironov, ‘Addis-Abeba, trevozhnaya vesna 91-go,’ in *Afrika v vospominaniyakh veteranov diplomaticheskoi sluzhby*, 215.

<sup>814</sup> Kaufman, ‘Ports and Oil,’ A12.

<sup>815</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 189.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> Kaufman, Op. cit., A12.

presence in Somalia, thereby completing the superpower realignment in the Horn. Although the White House was initially reluctant to engage in Mogadishu, owing to the latter's unresolved territorial claims, Moscow perceived Washington's subsequent entry into Somalia as an effort to intensify the local conflict. Indeed, American-backed reactionary Arab regimes supported Eritrean separatist forces. Moreover, in the Bloc's analysis, the America's presence in the Horn was aimed at assisting the forces of reaction against the Ethiopian revolution, by creating conditions for weakening Ethiopia's economy and slowing the process of socialist transformations.

### VI. 3.1 Washington enters Mogadishu

In the Horn, the Ethiopian-Somali war and the heightened international attention towards the wider region of the North-East Indian Ocean, led to significant superpower re-alignment. The US Defence Department was increasingly concerned about the issue of basing rights in the Middle East. The only base Washington had in that part of the world at the time was at Diego Garcia. It was, however, useful for aircraft, unlike military ships, which needed six days to reach the Persian Gulf. As the US military had been looking for basing rights, one of the places they decided to develop was Somalia. It had the potential not only to provide access to the Indian Ocean, but it also had vast desert areas where the Americans could do low flying and bombing training.

The Soviet Union's expulsion from Somalia led to a sizable change in American policy towards the country. While Somalia seemed attractive as a possible staging and basing point in the region,<sup>818</sup> Washington was initially reluctant to engage in the country, owing to Mogadishu's unresolved territorial claims towards its neighbours and the regime's abysmal human rights record. In 1979, however, several crucial events in the Middle East

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<sup>818</sup> Interview with David J. Fischer, 6 March 1998, LoC, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

weakened Washington's reluctance to take political risks in the Horn. In January 1979, the abdication of the Shah of Iran provoked Brzezinski and the Pentagon's analysts to ponder alternative military options for the establishment of permanent US naval presence in the Indian Ocean. On 4 November, Iranian students seized the US embassy in Teheran and took American diplomats hostage. Prior to the beginning of the Iranian hostage crisis, Soviet activities in the southern Red Sea region were dismissed by regional experts. Although the strategic situation in the Horn of Africa might have remained fundamentally unchanged, the White House perception of the entire northwest corner of the Indian Ocean became linked to the Iranian crisis and the looming Soviet threat.<sup>819</sup>

In August 1980, Washington and Mogadishu concluded an agreement whereby access to air and naval facilities at the port of Berbera were granted to US Rapid Deployment Forces, in exchange for American support.<sup>820</sup> Somalia's geographical location provided it with the possibility to control the crucial waterways of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Suez Canal to Europe, and to monitor the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East, attaching to it great military-strategic and political significance.<sup>821</sup> The change in US attitudes towards Somalia became even more pronounced when Ronald Reagan entered the White House in January 1981. The Reagan Administration authorised Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to aid the Somali regime by providing military equipment. Attracted by the potential strategic value of the Somali coasts, the Pentagon made use of the Soviet-built port of Berbera and the nearby airport. It was observed by Soviet Bloc envoys that, apart from hosting American warships and submarines, Berbera welcomed around 1,000-1,200 US military. In line with the agreement with Siad, later in 1984, Washington started the expansion and modernisation

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<sup>819</sup> Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 199.

<sup>820</sup> Patman, *Strategic*, 5.

<sup>821</sup> V. Dimitrov, 'Informatsia za voennoto prisŭstvie na SASht v Somaliya,' 10 March 1986, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 43-7, a.e. 184, s.1, l. 35.

of the port and the airport at Chisimaio for which it reportedly allotted US\$45m.<sup>822</sup> In addition, American military training centres were opened to Somali officers, and US military and civilian experts were sent to Somalia.<sup>823</sup> In the 1980s, US security assistance alone was estimated at US\$370m, which placed Somalia first among sub-Saharan states in 1986.<sup>824</sup>

Soviet observers were prompted to conclude that the Americans only pretended that they wanted to bring peace to the area, but, in reality, their actions suggested the opposite.<sup>825</sup> The US activities in the Horn were seen by Moscow as an attempt to intensify the local conflict, and, while the new Ethiopian government demanded that Washington close its base in Asmara, the White House was not ready to relinquish its interests in the strategic area.<sup>826</sup> In addition, Soviet Bloc representatives in Ethiopia perceived the Washington's entry into Somalia as an attempt to guide 'reactionary forces internally and externally' and to suffocate the Ethiopian Revolution. Ultimately, the American objective in the Horn was understood to be aiming to deepen Ethiopia's economic problems and to postpone the establishment of the vanguard party. Moreover, the US supported reactionary Arab regimes and backed Eritrean separatist forces, which stood behind the secessionist groups in Ethiopia's Northern provinces. Importantly, the White House was suspected of covertly organising an operative centre against the

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>823</sup> Ahmed Qassim Ali, 'The Foreign Factor in the Somali Tragedy,' in *Mending Rips in the Sky*, eds. Hussein M. Adam and R. Ford (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997), 545-6.

<sup>824</sup> Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 16.

<sup>825</sup> The new lease on life of Cold War competition in the Horn is well evident in Moscow's suspicion that was trying Washington to further antagonise Mogadishu and Moscow. The CIA, on their part, saw in open Cuban broadcasts, possible Soviets and Cubans attempts to overthrow Siad. Nevertheless, the growing discontent that spread throughout the country, following the Ogaden debacle, led to a coup attempt on 9 April 1978. Despite the rumours of Soviet participation in it, there was no evidence that Moscow or pro-Soviet Somali elements were involved in this coup. See Intelligence Memorandum, 'The Coup Attempt in Somalia; Background,' CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, 8 May 1978, DDRS Online, [Accessed on 4 December 2008]; 'The Coup Attempt in Somalia; Background,' DDRS Online, [Accessed on 4 December 2008].

<sup>826</sup> A. Mikhaylov, 'US Policy in Horn,' FBIS-SOV, Radio Moscow in Somali to East Africa, 22 March 1978.

Ethiopian leadership at the US Embassy in Khartoum.<sup>827</sup> Similarly, to Mengistu, Washington's presence in both ports, Berbera in Somalia and Mombasa in Kenya, were a source of considerable concern as they provided, in his assessment, additional offensive means against the Addis Ababa regime,<sup>828</sup> thus creating a dangerous situation for the development of Ethiopian socio-political transformations.<sup>829</sup> Ultimately, Mengistu felt encircled by 'imperialist' forces.

### VI. 3.2 Moscow strengthens ties with Addis Ababa

The security concerns that prevailed in the early 1980s dictated that the Washington plans were directed at foiling the Eastern Bloc's efforts to control the process of disarmament and détente. The principle of Socialist solidarity, therefore, required a united response on the part of the Socialist states for the success of the cause of 'peace, stability, and national liberation movement.'<sup>830</sup> This internationalist approach justified the need of active participation in a joint effort to increase the influence of the Socialist countries.<sup>831</sup> By falling in the Socialist camp, therefore, Addis Ababa engaged in strengthening the ideological work and enhancing security measures with the introduction of national military service, which, in the eyes of the Bloc's diplomats, helped the Ethiopian revolution evolve within an extremely complex international setting, marked by total aggression on part of 'North American imperialism.'<sup>832</sup>

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<sup>827</sup> Memcon, Soviet Bloc Ambassadors to Addis Ababa, 29 May 1984, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 41, d. 78, pr. 1738, s. 3, l. 4.

<sup>828</sup> Memcon, Zhivkov-Mengistu, 10 July 1980, TsDA, f. 1B, op. 60, a.e. 269, s. 10.

<sup>829</sup> 'Setkání titulárů ZSS na poradě a pracovním obědě na ZÚ SSSR,' 5 December 1980, AMZV, sv. Navstevni G. Husaka v Etiopii 1981, č.j. 01087/80, s. 162.

<sup>830</sup> Memcon, Zhivkov-Mengistu, 11.

<sup>831</sup> Letter, Blagnik to Mazirko, c. end-1985, ABS, f. ZS-GŠ, z[akladni] sv[aze], Rezidentury Ašant, e[vidovaný] č[íslo] 133016, s. 141.

<sup>832</sup> Memcon, Soviet Bloc Ambassadors, DA MVnR, 2.

Undoubtedly, the most critical aspect of Soviet-Ethiopian rapprochement was rooted in the spirit of 'ideological affinity,' between the two states. It was magnified by the social causes of the Ethiopian revolution, which, to Moscow's representatives, appeared more distinctive and profound than those of other young African countries. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it seemed to Soviet diplomats that within Ethiopian society there was genuine class stratification, and that Mengistu was committed to working for the construction of socialism in Ethiopia, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism 'in pure form,' rather than on the invented variations of so-called African socialism. In the final analysis, Moscow concluded that the Ethiopian revolution had 'gained momentum.'<sup>833</sup>

In general, Moscow's opinion, developed in conjunction with discussions with Mengistu, favoured the processes of consolidation of Addis Ababa's progressive anti-imperialist positions and its alignment with the socialist community. To the Kremlin, Ethiopia was becoming one of its closest allies on the African continent.<sup>834</sup> The Soviet Union thus felt it should stand firmly on the side of the Ethiopian Revolution, viewing it as part of the world revolutionary process. Accordingly, at the end of the-1970s the Kremlin intended to continue its support for the development of Socialist Ethiopia, in order to help consolidate its co-operation on a multilateral level within the Socialist camp. Agreement was also reached between Moscow, its allies and Addis Ababa on the views of the paramount importance of addressing and solving the urgent economic problems of Ethiopia, stressing the need for the implementation of planned and co-ordinated work in this regard.<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>833</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 281; 283.

<sup>834</sup> 'Informace o výsledcích jednání s předsedou prozatímní vojenské správní rady Etiopie Mengistu Haile Mariamem,' NACR, f. A ÚV KSČ: Gustav Husák, k. 350, sv. 987, i. č. 9926, s. 5.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

The signing of a friendship treaty on 20 November 1978, during Mengistu's visit to Moscow, was the next logical step for the Soviet leadership in giving a legal expression to its commitment in Ethiopia. Similarly, as with the pact with Somalia, it acted more as a tool for promoting security, rather than fulfilling purely ideological objectives. Accordingly, the treaty itself fell short of pledging mutual military assistance, but called for co-operation 'in the interests of ensuring the defence capabilities' of the two states.<sup>836</sup> Nevertheless, the treaty offered a powerful moral and political support for the Ethiopian Revolution and aimed to consolidate further Soviet-Ethiopian relations, acting as a guarantor for the 'peace and security in the Horn of Africa.'<sup>837</sup>

The treaty largely coincided with the provisions of similar agreements between the Soviet Union and other countries, including Somalia; yet, there were nuances, hinting to the Soviet leadership that there was a potential mismatch in the way both sides perceived the nature of the pact. The pact with Somalia, signed in 1974 and abrogated in November of 1977, gave a greater emphasis to co-operation in the spirit of the struggle against 'imperialism and colonialism.' On the other hand, while the Soviet-Ethiopian pact accepted the right of peoples to self-determination, it focused on the fight against 'imperialism and expansionism,' thus, it hinted at the Somali territorial claims towards Ethiopia, as well as the Chinese claims to vast areas of the USSR. The discussion prior to the signing of the Treaty showed Soviet participants that, despite the markedly friendly relations between Moscow and Addis Ababa, co-operation with Ethiopia was not going to be an easy task. The Ethiopians understood the pact primarily from the standpoint of their own national interests, trying to put the Soviet side at odds with her broader foreign

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<sup>836</sup> K. Klose, 'Soviets, Ethiopia Vow Cooperation on Defense Issues,' *The Washington Post*, 22 November, A20.

<sup>837</sup> 'Informace o výsledcích jednání,' s. 1.

policy interests<sup>838</sup> of maintaining peace and security in the highly volatile region of the Horn.

#### VI. 4. Problems between Soviet Union and Ethiopia

From the mid-1980s, with the lessening of superpower rivalry, Moscow displayed a marked shift from security concerns to preoccupation with domestic Ethiopian developments. The Soviets became increasingly critical towards Mengistu's nationalist tendencies and the lack of economic growth. Moreover, on the political front, Ethiopia showed little progress in the creation of the Marxist party, which was perceived as an important policy control instrument by the Kremlin. As a result, Moscow shifted its local course of action by despatching experienced party cadres, instead of career diplomats. These had the mandate to guide the Ethiopian Government along the path of building socialism.

##### VI. 4.1 Mengistu's centralism

Initially, from 1977, Soviet leaders showed a willingness to supply troops and military equipment for the suppression of local rebellions in Ethiopia, furthering the objective of helping to promote local stability. Gradually, in the 1980s, despite the ideological affinity displayed by Addis Ababa, Moscow encountered many problems with regard to its new ally's domestic development. The Soviets were trying to exploit their position of influence to press for the country's transformation into a fully Marxist state with political

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<sup>838</sup> Sinityn, *Missiya*, 279.

structures on the Soviet model. This dogmatic approach encountered strongly nationalist and traditionalist resistance.<sup>839</sup>

Back in 1978, discussing Mengistu's conduct in Eritrea and the Ogaden, CPSU CC Politburo recognised that the Ethiopians were 'behaving incorrectly in Eritrea.' Soviet and Cuban representatives in Addis-Ababa witnessed various displays of nationalistic moods.<sup>840</sup> These were centred on subjective elements, such as the increased ambition of Mengistu's authoritarian style of governance, which culminated in the development of a cult of personality. The Ethiopian leader concentrated, in his hands, the control over the Commission for Organising the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), and the Commission on Economic Development of Ethiopia, as well as leading the Armed Forces.<sup>841</sup> In the meantime, it was difficult for Moscow to deal with Mengistu's continued 'orgy of violence' against his opposition. When the political commissar of Mengistu's army, Asrat Destu, was asked during his visit to Moscow in 1984 why the repressions persisted, he answered, 'We are doing what Lenin did. You cannot build socialism without red terror.' Two weeks following Destu's return to Ethiopia, he was killed in a shoot-out at a meeting of Mengistu's Revolutionary Council.<sup>842</sup>

#### VI. 4.2 The Marxist Party

Another example of a serious clash between Mengistu and the Soviets occurred over the creation of the vanguard party of Marxist-Leninist type, which the Kremlin saw as an important leverage tool for the implementation of Ethiopian socialist transformations. Although the idea of forming a party had been circulating since the beginning of the

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<sup>839</sup> FCO Background Brief, 'Ethiopia: Problems for the USSR,' July 1980, TNA, FO 973/100.

<sup>840</sup> 'About measures for the future strengthening of Soviet-Ethiopian relations,' Politburo meeting protocol No 112 of 14 August 1978, f. 3, op. 91, d. 272, ll. 140-3, APRF in CWIHPB, 100-1.

<sup>841</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 292.

<sup>842</sup> D. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 373; 416-17, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II*, 467-8.

revolution, there was no agreement on how it should be formed and to what guiding principle it should adhere. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Mengistu looked for Moscow's help in organising the party. In the first half of 1984, Several Communist Party delegations from the Bloc were sent to Ethiopia. In return, members of COPWE paid reciprocal visits to Moscow and to Eastern European capitals. From early 1982, Soviet ambassadors to Ethiopia were no longer career diplomats but senior party cadres. Konstantin Fomichenko, who was appointed ambassador in 1982, had previously been Moscow's party chief in one of the Soviet Central Asian republics, where his job was to keep the local population in step with Moscow. Fomichenko's successor, Gennadi Andreev, who arrived in Addis Ababa in May 1985, was of similar background, having arrived directly from the post of Soviet Party Representative in the Armenian SSR. Similarly, East European ambassadors were elected from the high party ranks. Notable in this regard is the East German ambassador, Hans Jagenow, sent out to Addis Ababa in the summer of 1983, who was also a senior SED functionary.<sup>843</sup>

Eventually, after a great delay, in 1984, the founding congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) marked the formal creation of a vanguard party. The building of socialism, and eventually of communism, was proclaimed as the Party's focal strategic objective. The WPE was characterised as the organiser and political leader of this process, and its ideological basis was declared to be Marxism-Leninism. In this regard, the first priority of the revolution was the establishment of a people's democratic republic, the foundation of which would constitute a union of workers and peasants in co-operation with the intelligentsia, the army, and civil servants who support the goals of the revolution.<sup>844</sup>

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<sup>843</sup> D. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 99-100.

<sup>844</sup> G. Krylova, 'National-Democratic Revolution in the Light of New Political Thinking (The Example of Ethiopia),' *Narody Azii I Afriki* 1 (1989), transl. P. Henze, re-printed in Henze, 'Glasnost About Building Socialism in Ethiopia,' *RAND Note* (1990), 27.

Despite Mengistu's solid ideological rhetoric, however, Bloc observers noted various problems, which marred the whole process of party formation. Juan Hernandez Machado, the then Second Secretary of the Cuban Embassy in Addis Ababa, shared with his Bloc colleagues that, shortly before the founding Congress, he was on a mission in the Wollo province, where he had noted weak agitation-propaganda work.<sup>845</sup> Additionally, important figures amongst the ranks of the military lacked political experience and had no sense of ideological issues or understanding of political processes while applying their demagogic methods before the masses.<sup>846</sup> Furthermore, Mengistu planned to build the party around him that would eventually be his own, staffed by members whom he would trust that would not foil plots against him. The Soviets seemed somewhat unappreciative of their new ally's preoccupation with personal safety. To them the establishment of a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party was a prime tool for ensuring that Ethiopia would maintain a correct path of development,<sup>847</sup> whereas Addis Ababa saw it as an ideological tool for guaranteeing the regime's grasp on power.

#### VI. 4.3 The lack of economic progress

In spite of accomplishments developed in WPE documents, the Ethiopian regime failed in its effort to find a solution to the most acute issues of national integration - the inclusion of the masses in the political process and the economic development.<sup>848</sup> In the mid-1980s, the Soviets observed, with disappointment, that the creation of the vanguard party suffered from the lack of a developed working class. Further, the grave economic

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<sup>845</sup> Memcon, Machado-Baltov, 12 January 1983, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya, op. 40, d. 66, pr. 1482, s. 1, l. 2.

<sup>846</sup> Working Group of the Central Committee of SED, 'Zur Herausbildung einer revolutionären Partei in Äthiopien,' 7 November 1978, SAPMO BArch, NSA, REEAD, b. 12, 1977-1978, f. 7/11/1978 R12891.

<sup>847</sup> Korn, *Ethiopia*, 97-8.

<sup>848</sup> G. Krylova, 'National-Democratic Revolution,' cited in Henze, 28.

difficulties gave rise to ideological issues,<sup>849</sup> and the absence of a concrete recipe to improve relations with Mogadishu.<sup>850</sup>

Furthermore, Addis Ababa's poor economic record gradually prompted the emergence and the development of an additional set of problems with Moscow. In revolutionary Ethiopia, the implementation of socialism created mixed results. The Derg's early measures in 1975 included widespread nationalisation of private enterprises, sweeping rural land reform, which constituted, in fact, nationalisation of all agricultural land, and urban land reform, which resulted in the confiscation and nationalisation of most privately owned rental property. In every aspect, socialist intervention in the economy had produced a vastly expanded bureaucracy, lowered efficiency, and, consequently, led to higher service costs, resulting in widespread corruption and inefficiency. Following the reforms introduced by the regime, Ethiopia's economic growth decreased to less than 2 per cent annually, as opposed to an average growth of 5-7 per cent in the decade prior to the revolution. Eventually, in 1984-85 it ceased entirely.<sup>851</sup>

The Ethiopian drought in 1983-4 and severely limited food supplies to affected regions, led to mass starvation in the highlands. The resulting famine claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of peasants in the north. Pleas for help to both the East and the West ensued. In discussing the situation during a meeting of Soviet Bloc representatives to Ethiopia, various causes for concern were shared. Accordingly, the Czechoslovak Ambassador noted that his country was unable to provide greater assistance to Ethiopia. Moreover, he expressed the view that the socialist states should have seriously considered their future steps, as it was likely that they would be constantly begged for help for a long time to come. 'Whatever we do, we won't be able to feed this nation' – he concluded.

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<sup>849</sup> Memcon, Soviet Bloc representatives, 29 May 1984, DAMVnR-RB, 1.

<sup>850</sup> Memcon, Soviet Bloc representatives to Addis Ababa, 23 April 1985, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 42, d. 77, pr. 1818, s. 11, l. 12.

<sup>851</sup> Henze, 'Marxism-Leninism in Ethiopia,' 36-9.

Similarly, Havana's envoy, Gonzalez, informed that his country had sent 5,000 tonnes of sugar in response to Ethiopian requests. He expressed his country's disappointment that the sugar was sold by the Ethiopians in Djibouti without coordinating this with the Cuban Embassy. In addition, Havana's representative expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that despite the insistence of the embassy the Ethiopian media did not report this assistance. The Soviet ambassador, Bocharov, mostly shared the thoughts of his Cuban colleague.<sup>852</sup>

Equally, towards the end of the 1980s in Moscow, the policy of *glasnost* came to re-appraise critically the Soviet Union's activism in the Third World, and in Ethiopia, in particular. Harsh comments were not spared for Mengistu's attempts at socialist building. Ethiopia's hurried and largely formal co-operative production was not matched by appropriate material conditions. In addition, the policy of forced resettlement of the peasants and reliance on political and administrative actions, rather than on economic incentives and material self-interest, had disrupted normal farming for millions of peasants, to the constant threat of famine.<sup>853</sup> The deepening crisis of Marxist economy during the mid-1980s in Ethiopia increased Addis Ababa's demands for Soviet Bloc assistance towards suppressing internal issues, speculating with a narrow interpretation of the Kremlin's 'internationalist' policy. The Ethiopian regime required 'a lot, quickly and freely.'<sup>854</sup>

## VI. 5. Soviet foreign policy at a crossroads

With the appointment of the CPSU's new General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, from the mid-1980s and the inception of the philosophy of 'new thinking,' the goal of building an alternative social-political model to Western capitalism was gradually abandoned.

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<sup>852</sup> Memcon, Soviet-Bloc representatives to Addis Ababa, 24 October 1984, DAMvNR, f. Ya., d. 78, sp. 41, a.e. 1744, ss. 2-4, ll. 3-5.

<sup>853</sup> Krylova, 'National-Democratic Revolution,' 28.

<sup>854</sup> Sinitsyn, *Missiya*, 291.

Consequently, the place of the Third World in superpower relations changed significantly. Third World conflicts came to be portrayed more as a serious drain on the meagre resources of developing countries, leading to local and international pressures. As a result, in a bid to succeed with a new foreign policy, Moscow had to disregard the myths of the confrontational ideology. The cases of Ethiopia, in particular, and the Horn, in general, provide an excellent example for the evolution of Soviet conduct in the Third World. From the late 1980s, it appears that, in agreement with his closest aide Chernyaev, the foreign minister Shevardnadze, and Third World specialists, such as Kornienko, Brutents, Starushenko, and Mironov, amongst others, Gorbachev appeared to have taken advantage of every opportunity to reduce Moscow's involvement in African conflicts and to decrease the tensions with America.

#### VI. 5.1 Gorbachev's 'new thinking'

In 1985, when Gorbachev became CPSU General Secretary, the new leader's experience was so minimal that no one imagined that he could take control of Soviet foreign affairs in such a short time.<sup>855</sup> The philosophy of the so-called *novoe myshlenie* or 'new thinking,' launched following his arrival, abandoned the goal of constructing an alternative social-political model opposed to and hostile towards Western capitalism. The comprehensive reform of the Soviet Union, the *perestroika*, renounced the ambition of Gorbachev's predecessors to mobilise and launch a heterogeneous army of the world's 'progressive forces' against the Western rival. Since Gorbachev believed that foreign

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<sup>855</sup> R. Medvedev and G. Chiesa, *Time of Change* (London: L. B. Tauris, 1991), 71-2.

policy should serve domestic needs, his ambitious domestic programme required a ‘calm’ international situation allowed attention to be successfully diverted to domestic reform.<sup>856</sup>

As such, this ideological about-turn relegated most of the former ‘liberation struggles’ to the category of ‘local conflicts,’ opening the way for negotiated solutions on the basis of pragmatic cooperation with the West, a perspective unthinkable in the atmosphere of heated ideological confrontation in the beginning at the 1980s.<sup>857</sup> Hence, gradually, the transformation fundamentally altered the rudiments of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>858</sup> As a result, the place of the Third World in international politics had changed. In Moscow, hardly anyone pretended any longer that turmoil in Asia, Africa, the Middle East or Latin America were part of some grand, heroic ‘national liberation struggle,’ once the *raison d’être* of Soviet commitments and intrusions. Instead, Third World conflicts came to be portrayed more as a ‘vast drain on the pitiful resources of developing countries and a catalyst to local and international tensions.’<sup>859</sup>

## VI. 5.2 From competition to cooperation in the Third World

Such sweeping changes, however, had to be applied gradually. The final version of Gorbachev’s report to the Party Congress in February and March 1986 was, therefore, a compromise between the new thinking and the old ideas of ‘proletarian internationalism.’ The report removed the ideological principle, however, that ‘peaceful coexistence is another form of class struggle.’ Stalin’s doctrine of ‘two camps,’ an indivisible part of the

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<sup>856</sup> S. Woodby, *Gorbachev and the Decline of Ideology in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>857</sup> A. Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>858</sup> R. Legvold, ‘The Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy,’ in *Contemporary Issues in Soviet Foreign Policy*, eds. F. Fleron Jr., et al (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), 357.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

Soviet foreign policy since 1947, was to be steadily phased out.<sup>860</sup> Accordingly, in the spring of 1985, the ‘complete surrender’ of this position was still ‘unacceptable.’<sup>861</sup> It appears that the CPSU General Secretary was most likely biding his time, being not quite ready to begin a unilateral dismantling of the Soviet Union’s international positions.<sup>862</sup> Moscow, in his opinion, had to aim at maintaining positions in Africa, while countries were obtaining political and economic independence by relying on their own experience. Gorbachev had no illusions that this would be a swift and painless course. He knew the Kremlin had to rely on a long-term process.<sup>863</sup>

In addition, Gorbachev’s ‘new thinking’ was not to be immediately applied in situations where a sudden change of Moscow’s position would be seen as a betrayal by long-term close political allies, such as Cuba and North Korea. Similarly, Moscow was anxious to implement its new course in situations where the ideological support for the ‘anti-imperialist struggle’ had been used to cover Soviet superpower policies in maintaining its strategic positions, as in the case of the Middle East. On the other hand, Gorbachev appeared to have decided that Africa was peripheral to the objective of Soviet security and that too much attention had been given to lessening Western influence in the region and promoting pro-Soviet and leftist governments. The value and application of air and naval access were admittedly modest in Africa, and Soviet forces made negligible use of facilities that it had obtained.<sup>864</sup> Thus, in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, where it was just a matter of diminishing the overreach of Soviet foreign policy appetites,

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<sup>860</sup> R. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West* (New York: CUP, 2000), 210, cited in Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 286

<sup>861</sup> Zubok, *Op. cit.*, 283-4.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>863</sup> Gorbachev on his meeting with Chissano (Mozambique), Politburo meeting on 6 August 1987, in A. Chernyaev et al., *V. Politbiuro TsK KPSS... Po zapisyam Anatoliya Chernyaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova (1985-1991)* (Moskva: Al’pina Biznes Buks, 2006), 217-8.

<sup>864</sup> M. Goodman, *Gorbachev’s Retreat* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 114.

Gorbachev came to demonstrate his resolve in disengaging as quickly and as un sentimentally as possible.<sup>865</sup>

As superpower rivalry in the Middle East diminished, the Soviet Union reassessed its achievements in Africa. The CPSU General Secretary's close circle began to voice dissatisfaction with Marxist-Leninist dogmatism and Brezhnev's policies in Africa.<sup>866</sup> Brutents summarised these sentiments by concluding that without the superpower claims and the Cold War global confrontation, Moscow's Third World policy was 'uneconomic' and self-destructive.<sup>867</sup> Anatoly Chernyaev defended the view that with revolutionaries in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan, Moscow faced more troubles than when those countries were led by 'bourgeois governments.'<sup>868</sup> Similarly, Gleb Starushenko of the Soviet Institute of African Studies ultimately came to admit that 'there are no socialist states in sub-Saharan Africa, only socialist-orientated states.' With the tentative assumption that Africa was too underdeveloped for socialism, Starushenko posited that the continent might have to pass through a capitalist stage for a while, in order to benefit from it and become more susceptible to qualitative socialist societal transformation.<sup>869</sup>

This ideological volte-face further freed-up Soviet foreign policy giving it much needed flexibility with regard to Africa. Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze made his first trip to southern Africa in March 1990. Prior to his departure for Africa, he confirmed Moscow's desire to end ideological rivalry with the West in the Third World and develop a more pragmatic approach to international relations in the Third World. Following the end of his African trip, Shevardnadze stated that the 'intensive quality' of Moscow's relations with African states had decreased and assigned the higher priority to

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<sup>865</sup> Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, 112.

<sup>866</sup> A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnĭi iskhod* (Moskva: Rosspen: 2008), 720.

<sup>867</sup> K. Brutents, *Nesbĭvsheesia* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnĭe Otnosheniya, 2005), 171.

<sup>868</sup> G. Arbatov, *The System* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 322.

<sup>869</sup> R. Dowden, 'Soviet Era gives way to chaos,' *The Independent*, 14 March 1990, 17.

resolving regional conflict.<sup>870</sup> His visits to the countries of Africa and Central and South America strengthened his conviction that the notion of ‘reasonable sufficiency’ could be beneficial in these regions. In his views, ‘without disarmament, reduction of military expenditure, conversion of military industries, and release of resources for developmental needs,’ it will be extremely difficult to tackle the challenging global issues.<sup>871</sup>

## VI. 6. The ‘new thinking’ in action

The case of Ethiopia provides an excellent example of the gradual evolution of the Soviet Union’s conduct in the Third World. Initially, however, Gorbachev’s ideas were still ‘contaminated’ by ideological and class mythology.<sup>872</sup> Similarly, Gorbachev talked about how dangerous the arms race was for the existence of humanity and, at the same time, he emphasised the necessity for maintaining control in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and other African countries that were ‘taking the anti-imperialist path.’<sup>873</sup> Still, in April 1987, Gorbachev saw the complicated situation in the Horn as a consequence of meddling on the part of the imperialist forces, which ‘were hatching against Ethiopia hostile intentions.’<sup>874</sup> Consequently, in order to succeed with a new foreign policy, the Kremlin had to part with the myths and beliefs of an antagonistic ideology. Besides, through 1988, Gorbachev’s stance on Addis Ababa’s policies in northern Ethiopia took a gradual turn towards resolutely prompting and stimulating the search for a peaceful resolution.

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<sup>870</sup> Goodman, *Gorbachev’s Retreat*, 115.

<sup>871</sup> E. Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd, 1991), 169-170.

<sup>872</sup> A. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>874</sup> ‘Iz besedy s general’nym sekretarem TsK Rabocheĭ Partii Ėfiopii, Predsedatelem Vremennogo Administrativnogo Soveta Ėfiopii Mengistu Khaile Mariamom, 17 aprelya 1987 goda,’ in M. Gorbachev, *Sobranie sochinenii, tom 6* (Moskva: Ves’ Mir, 2008), 356.

## VI. 6.1 Ethiopian-Somali conflict

With the demise of the East-West divide in the late 1980s, however, the regimes in Somalia and Ethiopia began to lose their superpower life-support systems. Robert Patman argues that, in relation to the Horn of Africa, one of the most striking features of Gorbachev's policies gave a fresh emphasis on a peaceful solution to the Ethiopian-Somali dispute.<sup>875</sup> In the 1980s, however, the Soviet approach towards the Ogaden dispute, continued Moscow's pro-active line, favouring peaceful resolution, pursued during the 1960s-70s. More importantly, towards the end of the decade, Moscow and Washington introduced a qualitative new approach to the region, manifested by their attempt to co-operate in bringing both parties to the negotiation table, culminating in the 1988 Somali-Ethiopian peace accord. Moscow's support of the local negotiations and its willingness to mediate in the dispute, while continuing its previous policy, marked a significant departure from the *old* thinking. While the metropolis then realised that local stability provided a low-risk tactical approach of maintaining a presence in the periphery, the philosophy of the 'new thinking' posited that the promotion of local stability would provide a means of disengagement, following the decreased importance of the periphery in superpower relations.

On 17 January 1986, Mengistu and Siad Barre met in Djibouti for the first time in nearly a decade. It became apparent that Moscow was unwilling to play the role of mediator in the negotiations, as it was not invited by either party<sup>876</sup> with only Somalia seeking Soviet good offices.<sup>877</sup> Regardless, the Kremlin swiftly endorsed the new talks, and urged 'the speediest establishment of stable peace and good-neighbourly relations

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<sup>875</sup> Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 289.

<sup>876</sup> V. Dimitrov, 'Otnosheniya mezhdu Somaliya i Etiopiya,' 30 May 1987, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 44-7, a.e. 177, s. 6, l. 40.

<sup>877</sup> Cf. V. Dimitrov, 'Poshestnieto na somaliyskata delegatsiya v Moskva prez noemvri 1986 godina,' 15 January 1987, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 7, sp. 44-7, a.e. 180, s. 1, l. 2.

between Ethiopia and Somalia.’ However, the negotiations were interrupted by an Ethiopian-Somali border clash on 12 February 1987. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the peace talks were suspended in April 1987. Moscow’s reaction came on 10 September 1987, when, in a speech in Addis Ababa, marking the proclamation of the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Lev Zaikov, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and member of the Politburo, confirmed the Kremlin’s intention to oppose the transformation of Africa into an arena of confrontation, endorsing political settlement of regional conflicts.<sup>878</sup> In this regard, later in 1988, the United States and the Soviet Union pressed their respective allies in the Horn to sign a peace accord to put the bloody dispute over the Ogaden territory to an end.

## VI. 6.2 Ethiopian-Eritrean war

Recognising the changed international situation in line with the new thinking, over the closing years of the decade, Gorbachev’s position on Addis Ababa’s policies in northern Ethiopia took a turn towards stimulating the search for a peaceful resolution. Furthermore, Moscow was unwilling to allow the military burden to jeopardise the future development of the country and refused to fuel the war by continuing to deliver additional military supplies. Back in December 1978, however, Addis Ababa, backed by greater Soviet and Cuban involvement, won a decisive victory against the Eritrean secessionists. Although the Kremlin had been encouraging the Derg’s negotiation with the Eritrean nationalist factions, by the end of 1979, Moscow furnished Ethiopia with large quantities of arms. As a result, Addis Ababa’s lack of success on the military front, following the unsuccessful attempt of the 40,000-strong Ethiopia army to take Nacfa in July 1979, was an embarrassment to the Soviet Union. From early 1980, the Kremlin was

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<sup>878</sup> Patman, *The Soviet Union*, 290-1.

reportedly trying to convince various Eritrean groups to unite for negotiation with Addis Ababa.<sup>879</sup> Consequently, throughout 1988, Gorbachev's stance on Addis Ababa's policies in northern Ethiopia took a gradual turn towards resolutely prompting and stimulating the search for a peaceful resolution.

Nevertheless, Gorbachev's initial stance on the Eritrean question was a clear demonstration of his unsettled views on Moscow's role in local conflicts. In this context, a telling example of the CPSU leader's position was the way he dealt with Mengistu's pleas for military assistance. On 1 April 1988 Gorbachev was informed, by his foreign policy adviser, Chernyaev, that Mengistu had been calling for help while the Eritrean army had demolished his forces. While then, Gorbachev was willing to respond positively to Mengistu's pleas, Chernyaev, believed that, by immediately providing more weapons, the Kremlin would push Mengistu towards the desperate attempt to solve everything through military force.<sup>880</sup> Equally, Marshal Akhromeev, during a Politburo meeting in April 1988, depicted a 'catastrophically hopeless' picture of Mengistu's chances of winning a military victory. Thus, in effect, Moscow was pursuing Mengistu's 'worthless policies' instead of pursuing its own.<sup>881</sup> Consequently, in order for the policy of the new thinking to succeed, the Kremlin had to abandon its confrontational ideology.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, the experience of a prolonged armed struggle did not provide much optimism in Addis Ababa for a military victory. The Ethiopian army suffered a heavy defeat by guerrilla units, armed with Soviet weapons near the city of Af Abet in March 1988, losing around 18,000 troops.<sup>882</sup> As a result, the Soviet government finally realised the futility of participating in someone else's civil war and officially declared that the Soviet military specialists do not participate in the internal conflicts of

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<sup>879</sup> FCO Background Brief, 'Ethiopia: Problems for the USSR,' July 1980, TNA, FO 973/100.

<sup>880</sup> *The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1987-1988*, NSA, [Accessed Online on 23 August 2010].

<sup>881</sup> Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyĭ iskhod*, 749.

<sup>882</sup> Puzyrev, *Torgovyĭ*, 46.

Ethiopia.<sup>883</sup> In the spring of 1988, Karen Brutents visited Mengistu and delivered a message from Gorbachev and the Politburo which read that, ‘the solution [of the nationalities issue] can only be on the political path’<sup>884</sup>

Later in the summer, Gorbachev received Mengistu and considered the notion that Ethiopia might have to continue strengthening progressive domestic policies, attracting workers to the revolution, and thus ensuring the stability of its society.<sup>885</sup> According to Gorbachev, quantitative expansion of military forces would not solve the Ethiopian territorial problem. Moscow was unwilling to allow the military burden to hinder the development of the country.<sup>886</sup> Towards the end of the 1980s, the conflicting sides began to display tentative signs of realising that a military conflict would not be sufficient in finding a solution to the issues between them, and that a decisive outcome could not be reached by clashing armed forces, given the strength of the involved parties.<sup>887</sup> In further nourishing this attempt at finding a peaceful solution to the dispute, the Soviet Union backed a meeting of representatives of the Ethiopian leadership and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front in Atlanta under the mediating efforts of Jimmy Carter on 7 September 1989 which intended to initiate business-like negotiations over the Eritrean settlement.<sup>888</sup>

Despite these encouraging steps, the military situation in the north continued to stagnate. The militant wing of the EPLP, led by Isaias Afewerki, disagreed with the prospect of administrative autonomy from Addis Ababa and vowed for a continuation of the Eritrean armed struggle. Simultaneously, Mengistu continued his search for other

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>884</sup> Brutents, *Tridtsat*, 217-8.

<sup>885</sup> ‘Iz besedy s general’nym sekretarem TsK Rabochei Partii Éfiopii, Prezidentom Éfiopii Mengistu Khaile Mariamom, 26 iulia 1988 goda,’ in M. Gorbachev, *Sobranie sochinenii, tom 11* (Moskva: Ves’ Mir, 2009), 422.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>887</sup> ‘Hlášení residency o činnosti za období srpen – listopad 1988,’ 28 November 1988, ABS, f. ZS-GŠ, sv. Rezidency Ašant, e. č. 133016 / P-3, Ašant – 794, č.j.: 0028/88, s. 141.

<sup>888</sup> Letter, Gorbachev to Mengistu, 19 September 1989, RGANI, f. 89, per. 10, d. 43, l. 1.

sources of arms. By August 1990, Washington understood that Ethiopia's leader had seen the US, not as 'a mentor for peace,' but rather as having used the Atlanta negotiations as a cover for finding more military supplies.<sup>889</sup> In further confirming this observation, the Ethiopian government aimed to proceed with the planned growth of the army in 1989-90, raising it to 600,000 troops.<sup>890</sup>

For the Kremlin, Addis Ababa's determination to continue the war, against the background of a dire economic situation, sharply increased the discontent of the population. Unrest amongst the armed forces not only led to soldiers' unwillingness to fight, but also strengthened their disbelief in the possibility of victory. In addition, hostility towards Mengistu was noticed by the security personnel and even his personal guard.<sup>891</sup> While the political survival of the Ethiopian leader and his closest associates seemed increasingly uncertain, Moscow looked even more decisive in its desire to contribute towards the stabilisation of the political situation in Ethiopia.<sup>892</sup>

The Kremlin's ultimate objective was to achieve peace and national stability, in order to preserve Ethiopia's territorial integrity and unity.<sup>893</sup> As the situation in Ethiopia continued to deteriorate, in a letter to the GDR's leader Erich Honecker, Gorbachev sought East Germany's good offices in an attempt to persuade Mengistu to engage in finding a peaceful solution to the Eritrean problem. The Soviet leader expressed his serious concern regarding the negative influence of the war in Eritrea and Tigray on the Ethiopian regime. Moscow expected the defeats of the Ethiopian army in Tigray and Eritrea in 1988 to bring about complete loss of government control over the northern part of the country. This precarious situation further reinforced Soviet concern for the fate of

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<sup>889</sup> Interview with Herman J Cohen, 15 August 1996, LoC, ADST Online, [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>890</sup> 'Hlášení residency,' ABS, 141.

<sup>891</sup> 'O nasheĭ dal'neĭsheĭ linii v otnoshenii Ēfiopii,' note to Protocol P172 to CPSU CC Politburo meeting of 17 November 1989, RGANI, f. 89, per. 10, d. 45, l. 3.

<sup>892</sup> 'O vnutripoliticheskom krizise v Ēfiopii i vozmozhnykh shagakh SSSR po ego uregulirovaniyu,' RGANI, f. 89, per. 11, d. 189, l. 4.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid.

the Ethiopian Revolution. However, Gorbachev was resolute. He wished to continue working with the Ethiopian leadership, prompting Mengistu to seek a mutually acceptable compromise for negotiation with the Eritrean organisations and reach an agreement with them on a ceasefire.<sup>894</sup>

Gorbachev's persistent attempts to change Mengistu's modus operandi in the northern provinces were evident in the high-level delegation he sent to Addis Ababa. The mission, consisting of the Politburo member and the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Viktor Chebrikov and the deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin, visited Ethiopia from 6 to 9 January 1989. In a meeting with Mengistu, in expressing the seriousness of the situation as seen from Moscow, Chebrikov suggested that the discussion of the Eritrean problem should be regarded as a continuation of the dialogue between the Communist parties in Moscow and Addis Ababa. Chebrikov strongly emphasised that the material costs and sacrifices made by both sides in the conflict were not justified. Existing problems in the north, viewed in their historical and political perspective, led to the conclusion that they were impossible to be solved by military means.<sup>895</sup> Therefore, while moving forward scheduled deliveries of tanks and ammunition in 1989, worth 18 million Roubles, the Soviet leadership decided that sending additional weapons would be inappropriate.<sup>896</sup> Although Moscow's leader wished to disengage from local conflicts, the fact that the Kremlin continued to honour a previous military agreement in Ethiopia, hints at the potential inertia inherited from the *old* thinking, where a radical change of the Soviet Union's position would be seen as a betrayal to old-standing local allies. The lack of willingness on Moscow's part, however,

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<sup>894</sup> Letter, Gorbachev to Honecker, n. d., SAPMO BArch, DY30/2389, s. 223.

<sup>895</sup> Memcon, Dimitriev-Naidenov, 10 March 1989, DAMVnR-RB, f. Ya., op. 46-7, a.e. 48, ss. 1-2, ll. 7-8.

<sup>896</sup> 'O nashikh shagakh v svyazi s obrashcheniyami Mengistu Haile Mariama,' note to point 30 of CPSU CC Protocol meeting no. 165 of 19 September 1989, RGANI, f. 89, per. 10, d. 43, l. 3.

to sanction new deliveries to Ethiopia, clearly demonstrated Soviet resolve to implement the drastic foreign policy reforms of the ‘new thinking.’

### VI. 6.3 Soviet-American cooperation in the Horn

While in the 1970s and 1980s Soviet-US competition admittedly played a negative role in exacerbating social-political problems in the Horn of Africa via the delivery of vast amounts of military material, cooperation between the great powers created the conditions to reduce them in the 1990s.<sup>897</sup> Unlike Brezhnev, who looked for opportunities to expand the military presence in the Third World, Gorbachev aimed at reducing the Soviet presence and pursued solutions to regional confrontation.<sup>898</sup> The latter appeared to have taken advantage of every opportunity to arrange a role in any discussions in Africa to reduce Moscow’s involvement in conflicts in the region and to lessen the tensions with America.

Historically, Africa was widely regarded as a pawn on the East-West chessboard, according to the US Secretary of State, James Baker. For more than a generation, American policy in the continent had been driven by East-West confrontation. The end of the Cold War and Gorbachev’s rise created opportunities to clear away some of the regional bases for US-Soviet tensions. A decade of superpower confrontation was gradually beginning to display the signs of ‘terminal fatigue.’<sup>899</sup> Secretary Baker favoured cooperation with the Soviet government in resolving regional conflicts. As the Kremlin had significant arms delivery commitments to Angola and Ethiopia, amounting to about two billion dollars a year, and since Moscow was no longer interested in following Cold War objectives, they wanted to leave, and sought Washington’s assistance in this process. To the Kremlin’s leaders, the honourable way to exit Africa was to try to end these civil wars. Working with

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<sup>897</sup> Goodman, *Gorbachev’s Retreat*, 176; See also V. Shubin, *The Hot Cold War* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 264.

<sup>898</sup> Goodman, *Op. cit.*, 176.

<sup>899</sup> J. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons: 1995), 218.

the Soviet Union was the highest priority for the White House, and Washington agreed to liaise with Moscow on both Angola and Ethiopia without a delay.<sup>900</sup>

The turning point in the superpowers' approach toward Africa came about in 1988, when Moscow acted behind-the-scenes in a bid to end the thirteen-year Cuban and South African presence in Angola. Since Washington did not have diplomatic relations with Angola or Cuba, the White House was unable to mediate the agreement, signed in 1988 at the United Nations, without Soviet pressure on both Luanda and Havana. The Angolan issue, which was one of the symbols of the collapse of the *détente*, turned out to be the focal point of Soviet-American cooperation in resolving regional disputes in the Third World.<sup>901</sup> Continuing along this line, the Kremlin accepted the possibility for Washington to help influence the Eritreans, as Washington reportedly had better relations with them and a greater chance of getting them to the negotiating table.<sup>902</sup> In addition, Moscow was not opposed to the prospective development of co-operative relations between Washington and Ethiopia. In effect, the Soviets sought to encourage Mengistu to improve Ethiopia's relations with the US.<sup>903</sup>

To Gorbachev's surprise, during Reagan's visit to Moscow in May 1988, when raising the Horn of Africa issue, the American President was not as aggressive as he usually was in regard to Ethiopia. He criticised Addis Ababa's policy of obstructing the distribution of food to the starving people affected by the war with Eritrea, thus sounding out his concern of a famine in the impoverished countryside.<sup>904</sup> Subsequently, the clear 'demonstration of a Soviet-American common political approach'<sup>905</sup> towards Ethiopia's crisis occurred in June 1990, when both superpowers signed a joint statement, pledging to

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<sup>900</sup> Interview with H. Cohen, 15 August 1996, LoC, ADST Online [Accessed on 11 April 2009].

<sup>901</sup> Goodman, *Gorbachev's Retreat*, 115.

<sup>902</sup> Memcon, Crocker-Brutents, 31 May 1988, DDRS Online [Accessed on 4 December 2008].

<sup>903</sup> H. Cohen, ADST Online.

<sup>904</sup> 'Iz besedy s general'nym sekretarem TsK Rabocheĭ Partii Éfiopii, Prezidentom Éfiopii Mengistu Khaile Mariamom, 26 iulia 1988 goda,' in Gorbachev, *tom 11*, 423.

<sup>905</sup> M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (London: Bantam, 1997), 700.

save Ethiopians from starvation by providing joint food airlifts to the African nation.

According to the statement:

‘In addition, to deal with the growing problems of starvation, the US and the USSR are prepared to work together and combine their assets. US food will be transported on soviet aircraft to demonstrate our joint commitment to responding to this tragic humanitarian problem.’<sup>906</sup>

The political line of the Soviet Union on the Ethiopian conflict aimed to confirm Moscow’s resolve to highlight the effectiveness of the *new thinking*. It was designed to demonstrate ‘the open, honest, and peace-keeping nature of Soviet foreign policy,’ proving its real commitment to the principles of ‘recognition for the peoples’ freedom of choice,’ in its ultimate support of the ‘ideas of democratisation and humanisation of international relations.’<sup>907</sup> Essentially, in its dealings with Ethiopia, Moscow strived to prevent the emergence of a new dangerous hotbed of international tension, which might have had unpredictable consequences for the security of the nexus of North-East Africa and the Middle East.<sup>908</sup>

#### VI. 6.4 Soviet Withdrawal from Ethiopia

Towards the late 1980s, as Mengistu’s leadership looked increasingly vulnerable, Moscow, expecting a potential regime change, intended to preserve the friendly nature of the Soviet-Ethiopian relations. This, however, was a difficult task. While, Moscow found itself under Addis Ababa’s constant demands for further military supplies, the Kremlin concluded that the continuation of military supplies to Addis Ababa was unlikely to strengthen it. Moscow, at the same time, encouraged, Mengistu to seek Western help.

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<sup>906</sup> ‘Joint Soviet-US statement on Ethiopia and Horn of Africa,’ TASS, 3 June 1990.

<sup>907</sup> ‘O vnutripoliticheskom krizise v Ėfiopii i vozmozhnykh shagakh SSSR po ego uregulirovaniyu,’ RGANI, f. 89, per. 11, d. 189, l. 6.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 5.

America's approach, however, agreed with the Soviet line of seeking a peaceful solution to the local conflict and the regime lost its external material support.

Back in the mid-1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and began talking about *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Mengistu was unable to comprehend the meaning of the rhetoric used by the Kremlin's new leader.<sup>909</sup> While the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of the WPE of November 1988 declared Addis Ababa's determination to create the foundations of socialism by 1994,<sup>910</sup> the Ethiopian leader felt the Kremlin had abandoned him along with his exercise of building socialism. As a result, he removed the remaining signs of Marxism, and renamed the Workers Party of Ethiopia the Democratic Unity Party. In the economic sphere, the government liberalised prices and committed itself to a mixed economy in which the private sector and the state were to co-operate. Mengistu's measures were expected in Moscow. Taking into account the Soviet Union's own political and economic programmes of restructuring, the 'Ethiopian *perestroika*' was welcomed by the Soviet leadership.<sup>911</sup> However, many observers interpreted these sweeping changes as a 'death-bed conversion.'<sup>912</sup>

At the turn of the decade, the Russians recommended that Addis Ababa be realistic and seek aid from the West. On 1 November 1990, Mengistu told the deputy-chief of PGU-KGB, Vadim Kirpichenko, who paid him a visit in Addis Ababa, that without Soviet military assistance, he would not be able to conduct negotiations with the armed opposition, and that the consequences for his regime would be catastrophic.<sup>913</sup> Mengistu's loss of his Soviet Bloc allies, coupled with the increased military pressure exerted by the regional insurgents, forced him to seek friends in the West. As such, Addis

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<sup>909</sup> R. Orizio, *Talk of the Devil* (London: Vintage, 2004), 152-3.

<sup>910</sup> 'Hlášení residency,' ABS, 141.

<sup>911</sup> K. Somerville, 'Sub-Saharan Africa,' in *Yearbook of Soviet Foreign Relations*, ed. A. Pravda (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), 218.

<sup>912</sup> R. Dowden, 'Soviet Era gives way to chaos,' *The Independent*, 14 March 1990, 17.

<sup>913</sup> V. Kirpichenko, *Razvedka* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 2001), 208.

Ababa reinstated diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv in November 1989, as it hoped that the good offices of Israel would be useful in improving its relations with Washington and, in this way, in strengthening its bargaining position vis-à-vis the rebels.<sup>914</sup> Regardless, in March 1990, the architect of the Ethiopian-Israeli relations, Kassa Kebed, arrived in the US only to be granted an audience with Herman Cohen. He returned to Addis Ababa without a promise of American aid. Additionally, in the late 1980s, the relations between the US, the EPLF, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were improving steadily. Apparently, in 1988, following the Reagan-Gorbachev Iceland summit, Chester Crocker, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, adopted a policy on the subject, implemented by his successor, Herman Cohen, to develop relations with the two main insurgent groups.<sup>915</sup>

At the same time, Moscow decided that the continuation of military assistance to the Ethiopian regime would be unlikely to strengthen it, but it could cause a surge of anti-Soviet sentiments in Ethiopia, which might harm the Soviet Union's regional interests. Moscow's military supplies and the presence of Soviet military advisers in Ethiopia allowed the Ethiopian people, as well as the international community, to look at the Kremlin's role as interference in the country's domestic affairs. As a result, the Kremlin deemed it necessary to remove Soviet military advisers and specialists from conflict areas in Northern Ethiopia.<sup>916</sup> Consequently, on 10 February 1990, Radio Moscow in Amharic announced that all Soviet advisers have been withdrawn from Eritrea.<sup>917</sup>

Despite this, in its bilateral relations with Addis Ababa, the Kremlin aimed at continuing traditionally friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia. As the Mengistu's leadership looked increasingly vulnerable, in the event of a possible regime

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<sup>914</sup> Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 360.

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>916</sup> 'O nasheĭ dal'neisheĭ linii v otnoshenii Éfiopii,' note to Protocol P172 to CPSU CC Politburo meeting of 17 November 1989, RGANI, f. 89, per. 10, d. 45, ll. 7-8.

<sup>917</sup> Somerville, 'Sub-Saharan Africa,' 219.

change, Moscow intended to preserve the friendly nature of the Soviet-Ethiopian relations.<sup>918</sup> Still, this proved to be a remarkably tricky task, as Moscow had to deal with Addis Ababa's urgent request for the provision of weapons, ammunition, and spare parts worth 3 billion Roubles.<sup>919</sup> On 11 May 1990, Politburo, however, decided to avoid the further allocation of significant amounts of heavy weapons, as well as ammunitions, carefully applying the principle of 'reasonable sufficiency.'<sup>920</sup>

## VI. 7. Conclusion: Moscow and Washington exit the Horn; Mengistu and Siad step down

While superpower rivalry during the Cold War did not cause the conflicts in the Horn of Africa, both Somalia and Ethiopia proved capable of exploiting bi-polar antagonisms to their own advantage. At the turn of the 1980s, however, the decrease in East-West tension, which coincided with Mogadishu's defeat in the North, and the aggravation of centrifugal forces on the edges of the former Ethiopian Empire gave rise to growing international criticism towards the domestic policies of both local leaders. The combination of deepening local cleavages and the simultaneous lessening of superpower tensions engendered Mengistu and Siad's demise. Events on the both sides of the border in early 1991 demonstrated the interconnectedness between superpower presence and the regimes' hold on power. As soon as regional conflicts were assigned a lower priority on the international agenda, Moscow and Washington's withdrawal from local hotbeds of conflict precipitated the end of regimes that had used superpower rivalry to their own benefit.

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<sup>918</sup> 'O vnutripoliticheskom krizise v Éfiopii,' RGANI, 5.

<sup>919</sup> 'O rezul'tatakh rassmotreniya pros'by General'nogo sekretarya TsK Rabocheĭ partii Éfiopii, Prezidenta Narodnoĭ Demokraticheskoĭ Respubliki Éfiopii Mengistu Haile Mariama,' memo re. point 18 of CPSU CC Politburo meeting no. 187 of 11 May 1990, RGANI, f. 89, per. 10, d. 59, l. 1.

<sup>920</sup> 'O nasheĭ dal'neisheĭ linii v otnoshenii Éfiopii,' RGANI, 8.

In Ethiopia's case, overenthusiastic youths toppled Lenin's bronze statue, a gift of the Communist Party of the USSR, marking the end of Soviet dominance in Ethiopia.<sup>921</sup> By 1991, however, the Soviet military mission was eventually withdrawn from Ethiopia. In total, from 1975 to 1991, the country was visited by 11,143 Soviet military personnel, of whom 79, including two generals, were killed; nine were wounded and five were missing; the total value of shipments of the Soviet Union to Ethiopia in this period amounted to US\$ 10 billion.<sup>922</sup> Consequently, as Mengistu's overstretched and demoralised army felt the strain from decreased military supplies and depleted international support, Eritrea's long-standing bloody struggle for independence swiftly approached its final act. The EPLF's ally – the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), headed by the present leader of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, was preparing for a decisive offensive in the South, as well as in Addis Ababa.<sup>923</sup> On 21 May, Mengistu was put on a plane, despatched by the American government, and flown to Harare in an extracting exercise, masterminded by Assistant Secretary Cohen.<sup>924</sup> A few days later in London, Cohen agreed to Meles' suggestion to bring EPRDF forces into the capital without further delay.<sup>925</sup>

Across the border, in Somalia, the superpower realignment led to a massive influx of American weapons that helped Mogadishu sustain a ravaging civil war.<sup>926</sup> Throughout the 1980s, Siad's mistrust towards various clans, which formed the main building blocks of the Somali society, gathered momentum, leading to a full-blown civil war, which threatened Somali unity. Siad's wide-spread abuses against Majerteen clan members

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<sup>921</sup> Gebru Tareke, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (New Haven; London: YUP, 2009), 308.

<sup>922</sup> 'Armiya. Voïna v Éfiopii. 1977-1991,' *Kommersant-Vlast*, 4 May 2001, 57.

<sup>923</sup> Mironov, 'Addis-Abeba, trevozhnaya vesna 91-go,' 215.

<sup>924</sup> Orizio, *Op. cit.*, 146.

<sup>925</sup> P. Henze, *Ethiopia in 1991* (RAND, 1991), 11.

<sup>926</sup> J. Cohen, *Intervening in Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 222 cited in Woodward, *US Foreign Policy*, 27.

were concentrated in north-eastern and central Somalia.<sup>927</sup> By the end of January 1991, the Issaq-based Somalia National Movement had effectively neutralised Siad's forces and strengthened its position in the North, announcing on 18 May 1991, the establishment of the Somaliland Republic. The defeat of Siad Barre's army in the North ran parallel to the rebellion in the South, grouped around the United Somali Congress.<sup>928</sup> The ensuing inter-clan violence threatened Siad's position in the capital, and he finally turned his heavy artillery on the rebellious clans in the city. On 1 January 1991, US Navy and US Marine forces launched Operation Eastern Exit and hastily evacuated 281 people from 30 countries, including 8 Ambassadors and 39 Soviet citizens.<sup>929</sup> At the end of the month, when Siad's enemies attacked his residence, the Somali President fled from Mogadishu and took refuge in his Marehan clan home area on the Somali-Ethiopian border.<sup>930</sup>

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<sup>927</sup> Africa Watch Report, *Somalia: A Government At War With Its Own People* (New York: Africa Watch Committee, 1990), 29. See also I. Lewis, 'The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism,' *African Affairs* 88, no. 353 (1989): 573-79.

<sup>928</sup> Lewis, *Blood and Bone*, 227.

<sup>929</sup> A. Siegel, *Eastern Exit* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1991), iii.

<sup>930</sup> P. Gilkes, 'Descent into Chaos,' in *The Horn of Africa*, eds. Charles Gurdon (London: UCL Press, 1994), 47.

## Conclusion

In constructing a detailed narrative of Soviet involvement in Somalia and Ethiopia through the Cold War era, this thesis has sought to assess the impact of local, Somali-Ethiopian, regional, Middle Eastern and broader superpower international developments on the Kremlin's responses and initiatives in the Horn. Unlike previous studies on the subject, this thesis has tried to examine the Soviet involvement in the Horn through a pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War. According to the pericentric argument, one of the main reasons for the superpower involvement in the Third World was the deliberate policies of the lesser actors, who by using revolutionary slogans rather pragmatically sought to 'pull' the superpowers into situations Moscow and Washington might have otherwise avoided.

This thesis suggests that the dynamics were more complex: the metropolitan actors were motivated by their own interests when deciding to enter the periphery. The so-called initial 'push' by invitation,<sup>931</sup> by which the superpower entered the local fray, could be equally well described as a 'pull' by agreement. Moscow and Washington both appeared receptive to the local strong men's pulling strategies and aimed to embed and maintain a presence in an attempt to serve their own politico-strategic aims. Both superpowers made themselves available for the pulling power of the periphery; they wanted to be there, because they were primarily motivated by gaining presence at the expense of their arch-rival.

We have tried to contribute to the pericentric debate by providing a more complex understanding of centre-periphery relations in the Soviet case by focusing on the role of

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<sup>931</sup> Cf. Geir Lundestad's 'Empire by invitation? : the United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,' *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986).

various local actors, including Moscow's and Bloc representatives, as well as the local strong men in informing the Kremlin's policy choices. By constructing a complex matrix of tripartite localism, we sought to paint a more nuanced picture of thinking at the periphery and its bearing on metropolitan policy. By their understanding of developments in the area, Soviet and East-European envoys helped the Kremlin leaders interpret developments in the periphery through the prism of their international, strategic priorities. Diplomats in the region also played an important role in translating the requirements of the centre to the political forces on the ground. Soviet and Bloc representatives thus played an invaluable part as intermediaries between the centre and the periphery. Local assessments played an important part in shaping Moscow's responses to key developments on the ground, such as the abortive coup against Haile Selassie in 1960, Siad Barre's overthrow of the civilian government in 1969, and the dethronement of the Ethiopian Emperor in 1974. In these instances Moscow's local representatives reported their doubts about the sustainability of changes underway. Such assessments contributed to a more prudent Soviet stance towards developments. In cases such as Mengistu Haile Mariam's gradual rise to power, pro-active moves by local representatives led to a steady change in Moscow's attitude towards the emerging regime - the Soviet Union came to recognise Mengistu as a driving force behind Ethiopia's progressive transformations. In examining this and other cases, we have shown how information and assessments from local representatives helped to steer Moscow's responses to various demands on the ground.

Our findings suggest that Moscow's responses in the Horn reflected a combination of the two traditional strands associated with Moscow's foreign policy: the statist 'Narkomidel' line and the ideologically-oriented 'Cominternist' one. Our research showed that it is extremely difficult in practice to disentangle these strands. We found that these two lines did not conflict with one another but rather were incorporated into a

flexible tactical approach aimed at maximising influence with whatever means were available – ideological, military, diplomatic. By using a combination of means Moscow tended to take the line of least resistance, in order to maintain low-key presence and check American influence. This thesis has also demonstrated that Moscow was generally risk averse and gave priority to *realpolitik* considerations; questions of ideology acted as a motivating trigger which helped Kremlin's leaders justify their actions. The Ethiopian case demonstrates that Moscow's satisfaction with political and ideological change tended to produce increased interest in local developments. Similarly, when the Kremlin was disappointed with local political and ideological undertakings, such as Mengistu's projects in the early 1980s, this led to increased disillusionment about the potential for the further development of Ethiopia in a socialist direction. This in turn prompted a gradual decline in Soviet interest in the country. In the later 1980s, disillusionment and declining interest coincided with a radical reduction in tensions between Moscow and Washington and precipitated their exit from the Horn.

This study also aimed to shed some light on the interplay between various actors in Moscow, notably the Party Central Committee and Politburo, the Defence and Foreign Ministries, as well as the KGB. Our analysis of the evidence suggests that the Kremlin took a tactical approach which sought to accommodate various institutional interests and foreign policy approaches. The military leadership and the military-minded members of the Politburo, such as Grechko, the International Department, as well as the KGB - especially its chief, Andropov - had activist preferences, and generally favoured Soviet expansionism in the Third World. On the other hand, the Foreign Ministry was more pragmatically-oriented. The fact that these institutional policy preferences competed with one another helps to explain the flexibility of Moscow's policy. On the ground this manifested in an incremental behaviour towards developments of local significance.

Moscow took account of American local attitudes, the strength of the forces on the ground, their prospects, as well as their willingness to embrace the building of Socialism. On the other hand, policy circles in Moscow took a more pro-active stance towards those local developments it thought would affect high-priority international issues, concerning the strategic balance of power or relations with the United States.

This flexible approach served the Kremlin well in managing its engagement in the unpredictable and volatile Horn, which was replete with pro-active local actors who displayed notable skill in exploiting the Cold War to their own advantage. As this thesis has shown, the views of Moscow's local representatives and their East-European counterparts further encouraged the Kremlin to take a flexible approach. This line continued to assign the highest priority to safeguarding the homeland and so sought to avoid the risk of becoming involved in a conflict over regional issues with its global rival – Washington. We have found that Moscow's Bloc allies coordinated closely to further Moscow's line. The Russians needed the support of their East European allies to help them maintain a low profile in Ethiopia so as to avoid aggravating a conflict that might damage Moscow's wider strategic priorities.

The first two chapters demonstrated that Moscow's entry and its hedging exercise in the Horn were justified by American interest in the region, and by changes in the external international environment, as well as on the Soviet domestic scene. The increased international significance acquired by the newly-independent states, following the Bandung conference in 1955, clearly played a pivotal role in strengthening not only Moscow's, but also Washington's interest in the Third World. Changes in the Kremlin also played an important role. While Stalin had already begun to consider ways by which to increase influence in the former colonies, Khrushchev turned this change of thinking into action. A local initiative, launched in response to Kremlin's previous advances, allowed Moscow to

improve its standing in the Horn. From the outset, Haile Selassie launched a strategy to improve relations with the East, while being simultaneously courted by the West. This offered Moscow an opportunity to extend its influence in Ethiopia.

Secondly, an additional opening for the Kremlin was provided by the UN-sanctioned Somali independence in 1960. While it triggered a prolonged period of local tension by exacerbating Somali territorial claims, it enabled Moscow's military to find fertile ground for extending Soviet presence in the region. This exuberant approach was checked by Khrushchev's sober assessment of the viability of African socialism after fiascos with socialist experiments in Western Africa and Lumumba's ousting. Khrushchev's rather flexible approach confirmed the dual nature of Soviet foreign policy, balancing between cautious diplomacy and revolution. While becoming involved in Mogadishu, Moscow, aided by its East-European allies, launched careful propaganda efforts in Addis Ababa. As chapter two showed, the relatively quiet local scene in the 1960s underlined the competitive behaviour of the two superpowers. Their endeavours were aimed at countering each other's activities in an attempt to advance their own political influence at their rival's expense.

Chapter three showed that towards the late-1960s the wider Horn locale, including Sudan, witnessed sweeping political shifts as leftist military regimes seized power in Mogadishu and Khartoum. These developments apparently took place without Moscow's active participation. They ran almost in parallel with a gradual reduction in the Kremlin's influence in the wider region of North-East Africa and the Middle East. During this period, the Soviet military-strategic complex played a pivotal role in informing the Kremlin's Horn policies by emphasising the increased strategic value of the Indian Ocean. These years saw the departure of the British from Aden and the emergence of US plans to launch a base on the Diego Garcia archipelago. Somalia, therefore, came to occupy a central role in the

Soviet navy's regional plans, given its proximity to strategically vital shipping lanes in the North-western portion of the Indian Ocean.

In the first half of the 1970s, Moscow's involvement in the Horn changed gear, from a low key exercise into a more open engagement, exemplified by expansive projects of military infrastructure along the Somali Indian Ocean coast, aimed at serving Moscow's regional plans rather than enhancing Somalia's local capabilities. The pursuit of Soviet geostrategic objectives in Mogadishu therefore met strong Somali opposition. At the same time, the Kremlin engineered a combination of technical and legal brakes aimed at restraining Somalia's expansionist ambitions. Aware of the precarious nature of the local situation, Moscow was able to maintain its position in the country by pursuing incrementalist policies and taking a flexible approach.

As the Soviet Union became more deeply involved in Somalia, vast socio-political changes in Ethiopia gathered pace and came to modify the Kremlin's local outlook. Chapter four showed that Soviet and East European diplomatic representatives proved to be valuable allies in obtaining and sharing intelligence on the ground, and were initially in favour of close monitoring and cautious engagement. Early on, Moscow appeared not to be ready to extend the support requested by Addis Ababa. There was a notable mismatch between local actors' demands and the priorities of the Centre. Essentially, the Kremlin saw its engagement in Ethiopia as a long-term prospect, while Addis Ababa's new military leadership sought urgent decisions needed for the survival of the Ethiopian state. Addis Ababa demanded vast quantities of military aid, while Moscow was averse to the idea of increasing its risk-taking in the Horn, taking into account the American presence in the country and the need to keep Somalia in its sphere of influence while minimising disruptive instability.

From late 1976, Moscow's attitudes toward Ethiopia changed considerably. Taking more of a Cominternist policy line, the Kremlin responded favourably to Mengistu's pleas for military assistance. At the same time the flexible tactical approach typical of the Narkomindel strand of Soviet policy induced the Kremlin to persuade Addis Ababa to refrain from entering Somalia during the Ogaden war. Moreover, external factors, such as the increased involvement of other Soviet-allies, most notably Cuba, and the growing engagement of Western actors, such as the US, played an important role in shaping changes in Soviet attitudes towards the Horn from the early-to-mid 1977. Following their recognition of the progressive zeal of Mengistu's left wing military faction, Moscow's leaders, in close consultation with their diplomatic representatives, who took a positive view on Ethiopia's revolutionary potential, decided to gradually step up their political support for the new regime.

Local moves in early 1977 activated a Cominternist response from some in Moscow. Mengistu's coup engendered a notable shift in Soviet military support in defence of the Ethiopian revolution. The Kremlin's increasingly sympathetic approach towards the Ethiopian regime was further strengthened by a similar assessment of the situation by its East-European and Cuban allies in the spring of 1977. The events of the spring demonstrated the significant level of co-ordination and communication within the Soviet Bloc. In the summer Moscow's command role, which aimed to maximise the socialist camp's combined effort on the ground, became ever more evident. Moscow realised that the escalation of local conflict into open warfare might jeopardise the Soviet presence in the area by endangering Moscow's standing in Somalia and straining the process of progressive change in Ethiopia.

Aggressive Somali attacks on Ethiopia in summer 1977, presumably indirectly instigated by Washington's regional allies – notably Saudi Arabia – required an

immediate adjustment in Moscow's diplomatic approach. While in the spring, Kremlin relied on the power of diplomacy, towards the autumn it opted for a diplomacy of power. Moscow chose to toughen its stance towards Siad, whose aggressive actions severely threatened the Ethiopian revolution and so played into the hands of Moscow's international opponents. Additionally, his abrogation of the friendship treaty was harmful for Kremlin's international standing and considered an act of hostility against Moscow. After initially supporting a remarkable military operation against the Somalis, Moscow's civilian leadership reverted to its Narkomindel approach and sought to counter the ambitions of the Soviet military who contemplated taking the fight into Somalia in the spring of 1978. The Kremlin dismissed this idea, fearing that a Soviet-backed Ethiopian entry into Somalia would be seen by the Western countries, as well as the other African states and the international community, as going against the spirit of Moscow's overall involvement, which the Soviet leadership wanted such involvement to appear as beneficial to local stability. The Kremlin feared that Soviet support for Ethiopian action against Somalia would produce widespread international concern and further complicate Soviet-American relations.

Our analysis of Moscow's road to withdrawal from the Horn showed that Gorbachev's transformation of foreign policy led to a gradual normalisation of the relationship between Washington and Moscow. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was followed by similar actions in other parts of the world. Still, in the Horn the superpowers' endeavour to help settle Ethiopia's disputes with Somalia and Eritrea faced serious resistance on the part of Addis Ababa's regime. While Moscow fulfilled its previous obligations to Mengistu's regime, the late-1980s saw the Kremlin resolved to cease all military deliveries. American rapprochement with Mengistu's opposition forces and Moscow's reluctance to provide more military assistance to the regime led to the

Derg's collapse. Siad Barre suffered a similar fate. He had to flee Somalia after losing his power base. The last chapter of the thesis provided further insight into the manner in which superpower antagonism equipped the small states with a key instrument they used to 'pull' Moscow and Washington into local disputes.

Through its detailed examination of the factors that shaped Soviet's conduct in the Horn as they appeared throughout the Cold War, this thesis has sought to provide new insights into how superpowers' global priorities were further complicated by their policies towards the Third World.

We found that the escalation in neighbourly tensions increased the stake for the superpowers in a highly unpredictable setting by heightening the risk-taking needed for maintaining presence. In Moscow, while differing on some issues, civilian and military policy actors generally favoured stability and the Kremlin's responses to local developments showed an inclination to react promptly in the face of a growing prospect of loss. This helps explain Brezhnev's *realpolitik* response to Siad Barre's aggression against Mengistu's Ethiopia. When deciding to side with Mengistu's left-wing regime, Moscow took into account the fact that Addis Ababa denied Washington's access to its major military and civilian installations. This created an opportunity for the Soviet Union to strengthen its presence in the country, as relations with Somalia were deteriorating at a rapid pace. This thesis has shown that Moscow used effective timing and tactics in deciding to launch its immense material support for Addis Ababa, embedding the dual objective of solidifying a potentially *bone fide* Marxist regime, while attempting to avoid any reputational damage. Siad's decision to abrogate the friendship treaty was seen as an act of hostility by a friendly state. Kremlin's prestige as a leader of the Socialist commonwealth was potentially hurt and Moscow's speedy change of tactics speak for its willingness to teach the Somali president a lesson.

This thesis has also argued that the Soviet Union's activism in the Horn, besides the pursuit of the ambition to augment the Socialist international, was predominantly aimed at the avoidance of international instability involving its arch-rival. After attempting to gain and exercise as much influence as possible of a political and later of military nature, the Kremlin came to see its involvement in the Horn, and in the Third World, as part of a wider contest. From this perspective the Horn was viewed as an area of relatively low priority where relatively few risks should be taken. Accordingly, Khrushchev's rather sober assessment of the Somali situation in mid-1960s was influenced by the potential problems it posed for the Soviet Union's regional interest by developments in the Congo and West Africa. In the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union's success in Angola, as well as the assumed American unwillingness to engage in remote areas after Vietnam, clouded Moscow leaders' perception on White House's willingness to engage in distant parts of the globe. Moscow's aging leadership, failed to understand the degree of Washington's discontent about Moscow's Third World activism, which came close to jeopardising the primary line in Moscow's foreign policy, aimed at the spread of Soviet influence.

Arguably, the superpowers' Third World activism contributed to a marked deterioration of détente and brought about a new outbreak of hostility between Moscow and Washington in the first half of the 1980s that came to be known as the Second Cold War. Cold War zero-sum game thinking provided justification for the superpowers' competitive behaviour in remote areas previously thought of as insignificant. The extensive material examined in this thesis suggests that the Cold War in the Horn was 'hot' for the local parties who attempted to use the international system to their advantages. They fought against each other using arms whose import was facilitated by superpower strategic competition. For Moscow and Washington, however, the Cold War

in the Horn was indeed a 'cold' one; it was a calculated, tactical, and subdued form of competitive co-existence. The superpowers confrontation was waged *in* the Horn *for* the Horn. In the event, neither of the superpowers knew what to do with the area once they obtained the degree of influence they had sought. Their primary objective seemed to be to denying the region to their adversary. The radical decline in superpower rivalry in the later 1980s therefore facilitated the superpowers' exit from the Horn.

In the final analysis, the pericentric interpretative framework offered in this thesis is useful in explaining what happened to Moscow's, as well as to Washington's, Cold War policies in the Third World. In the late-1970s these gradually turned into a centre-piece of superpower competitive co-existence on the international stage. The process of 'pull by agreement' resulted in superpower over-commitment, followed by excessive responses to local conflicts. Despite Moscow's flexible, gradualist tactical approach to the Horn, the distinction between primary and secondary state interests became muddled in competition with Washington for influence in the periphery. In understanding the complex factors involved in the making of the Soviet Third World policy, this thesis recognised the importance of constructing a more nuanced model of centre-periphery relations. It has sought to offer a fully rounded picture of Soviet policy towards the Horn, involving detailed analyses and interpretation of domestic, local, regional, and global developments. We have shown that influence over the Kremlin's policy deliberations was exercised not only by the local states' political establishments, but also by Moscow's and Bloc diplomatic representatives. There was a complex dynamic on the ground, including communication between the Soviet and East European representatives, their interaction with political leaders, as well as interpretation of local developments. This process provided the information, which filtered through a host of bureaucratic channels on its way to the top, played an important role in shaping Kremlin's decision-making.

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