

**“Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden”:  
The United States, The Horn of Africa and The Demise  
of Détente.**

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## **Abstract**

The decade of the 1970s, despite representing the era of détente, superficially appeared to be one of Soviet successes and American setbacks. From Vietnam to Angola, the USSR seemed to be gaining Marxist friends in the Third World. Because of this, the Soviet Union wanted the United States to recognize it as an equal power in the world. With such acknowledgement, the Kremlin believed that negotiations to limit the arms race would then be mutually beneficial. On the other hand, President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger interpreted détente as a series of agreements and compromises to draw Moscow into an international system through which the United States could exercise some control over Soviet foreign relations, particularly with the Third World. These differing interpretations would prove to be the inherent flaw of détente and nowhere was this better illustrated than in the conflict in the Horn of Africa in 1974-78.

This dissertation aims to trace the responses of the Ford and Carter administrations to events in the Horn of Africa and their ultimate effect on Soviet-American bilateral relations. Through archival research at the Ford and Carter Libraries, the National Archives and Records Administration, the National Security Archive, and interviews with key participants, it will discuss the formation of American policy toward the Horn and how disagreements over the region influenced superpower détente, causing President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to claim that "SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden." My particular focus will diverge from previous authors in its emphasis on the Horn of Africa conflict being the catalyst that exposed the failure of détente and a decisive element in President Carter's transition from favouring conciliation to choosing confrontation with the Soviet Union.

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## **Introduction**

In 1977, the United States and the Soviet Union were still engaged in an era of détente, a reduction of tensions between the superpowers largely developed at the start of the decade by former US President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bilateral relations were certainly struggling when Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as President of the United States in January of the year, but the two countries had every hope that the new American President and the old Soviet leader would inject new life into the proceedings. In addition to problems over issues of trade and human rights, détente had suffered because of disagreements over Third World events in Chile, the Middle East and most recently Angola. Furthermore, the term had become highly controversial in the United States as the successive Republican administrations' foreign policy came under attack from both the left and the right of the political spectrum to the point that President Ford dropped use of the expression during the 1976 election campaign. Still, Moscow and Washington desired progress on the joint communiqué on Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) signed by Brezhnev and President Gerald Ford in Vladivostok on 23 November 1974 and both sides entered negotiations in good faith.

Détente was meant as a comprehensive reduction of tensions, targeting such diverse issues as arms control, trade, technology, the division of Europe and the competition for the Third World. However, Nixon and Brezhnev, because they could not agree on the last issue, coated over their differences and attempted to make progress in areas where they could find accommodation to the other's point of view. It was because of this ambiguity that détente disintegrated over the Third World. First, the Soviets felt

that they lost a key ally in Chile when a Western-leaning military coup ousted the democratically elected socialist President, Salvador Allende in 1973. That same year, the superpowers had relied on the hotline to successfully bring about a ceasefire in the October Yom Kippur War in the Middle East in which US ally Israel had beaten the Soviet Union's Arab allies. However, the United States had then proceeded to exclude the Soviet Union from subsequent peace talks. Moscow, hoping that détente would mean that Washington would recognize it as an equal power, had felt bruised by these instances, but not to the point that it was ready to denounce détente. For the United States, frustration over the failings of détente came to the forefront in 1975-76 during the next major competition in the Third World. In Angola, with the support of Cuban troops, the Soviets were able to achieve their desired outcome when the Marxist MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) defeated the US backed FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). Given that Kissinger had intended détente as a means of influencing Soviet behaviour in the Third World, the case of Angola demonstrated to the US government and the American people that their version of détente was not working.

These previous crises in the Third World raised the stakes of the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to the point that neither side was prepared to see another client lose. The scene was thus set for a confrontation over the next Third World flare-up. In 1977, the impoverished country of Somalia invaded its equally poor neighbour, Ethiopia, in an attempt to conquer Ethiopian land populated by ethnic Somalis. The region of the Horn of Africa had already received superpower attention and therefore contributed peripherally to the Cold War competition between the

two. However, when the Soviet Union and Cuba sent military advisors and troops to assist their new Ethiopian ally in repelling the attack in late 1977, this small border war became a major Cold War hotspot. Despite occurring during the era of détente, the Soviet Union and the United States could not come to an understanding on handling the dispute. The subsequent American reaction exposed fault lines within the US government that led to a serious discussion as to what superpower détente really meant to the United States. The issue of the Soviet intervention became such a concern to some members of the Carter administration that they attached progress on other bilateral issues to Soviet behaviour in the Horn. Specifically, the crisis undermined the key project of arms control discussions leading President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski to claim that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden."<sup>1</sup>

This oft repeated phrase has for almost thirty years defined the Carter administration's response to the Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa in 1977-78 and the subsequent demise of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The assertion hinted at both the ineffectual nature of the administration's foreign policy and Moscow's failure to realize how seriously Washington felt about active Soviet support for the spread of communism into the Third World. Such a controversial statement is the obvious starting point for assessing the American response to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, but it invites the risk of either trying to prove or disprove it. In fact, the relevant documents from the Carter administration illustrate that the reaction was far more nuanced and complex than Brzezinski's allegation implies. However, the same documents show that

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<sup>1</sup>Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977-1981* (New York: Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 1983), p.189, though he used the phrase during his tenure as National Security Advisor. The Ogaden is a desert in southeastern Ethiopia that Somalia invaded in 1977.

the Horn and SALT were indeed linked, even if it was the National Security Advisor who made it happen.

The American response to the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia is important for several reasons. First, this was one of the first foreign policy predicaments after the fall of South Vietnam and the American reaction illustrated the possibilities and limitations of US foreign policy after the national crisis of confidence brought about by the long war in Indochina. It had the effect of influencing a change in President Carter's relations with the Soviet Union from one of conciliation to one of confrontation and setting a new course in American foreign policy that would continue with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Second, the crisis demonstrated the extent to which the Cold War had moved beyond Europe. In fact, the continental order was by the mid-1970s rather stable and the status quo had largely been accepted through the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Instead, the superpowers took their competition now almost exclusively to the Third World and there is no doubt that the events in the Horn were part of that process. Although the regional players pursued goals that had nothing to do with the desires of the superpowers, the cynical switching of allies by the United States and Soviet Union was done in the old sense of zero-sum game thought processes. Moscow dropped Somalia for the bigger prize in Ethiopia and Washington adopted Somalia to counteract the Soviet presence in Addis Ababa. There was no oil at stake, little strategic importance, and only limited pressure from allies to get involved. There was a competition for the hearts and minds of the people of the Horn of Africa. Yet, it is not a story of superpower manipulation of junior partners. Actually, the regional players were able to use the Cold War mentality to

manipulate the superpowers to arm them heavily merely with the threat of turning to the enemy for assistance.

The conflict in the Horn, as illustrated by Brzezinski's quote, did not remain one of a list of Third World conflicts in which superpower involvement affected the countries involved, but had little immediate impact on the larger Cold War.<sup>2</sup> This particular crisis occurred at a time when the United States and Soviet Union were engaged in a period of détente and were searching for a new and less dangerous way to wage the Cold War. Whether they liked it or not, this search for a new emphasis raised the stakes of their competition in the Third World. For Moscow, the series of agreements that resulted from détente were a way of moving its competition with the United States beyond the race for arms and technology that it was losing. If the competition became one of ideology, then the Soviets felt they could win. Washington, for its part, intended détente to draw Moscow further into the international system so that the United States could better influence its rival's activities, particularly in the Third World. Thus, though the Soviets did not believe they were breaking the rules of détente by sending massive military assistance to aid the beleaguered Marxist regime in Ethiopia, the United States certainly thought so. On the heels of Soviet involvement in Angola in 1974-76, the Americans felt they needed to test whether they could make the Soviets play by their rules in Ethiopia. As it turns out, they could not.

As the major weakness (the two differing perceptions by the two superpowers) of détente was exposed, fault lines within the Carter administration solidified, turning the American response into a fight to determine the course of its whole foreign policy. The competing philosophies of President Carter's two top foreign policy advisors, Brzezinski

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<sup>2</sup> For example Iran 1953, Indonesia 1965, Dominican Republic 1965

and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, gained headlines as they advocated radically different approaches. Vance encouraged détente, diplomacy, and dealing with regional problems on a local level. Brzezinski, on the other hand, endorsed negotiation only from a position of strength and the idea that American policy should reflect the view that all the world is inextricably intertwined. As such, he did not support détente such as it was. At the centre of the debate, however, was Carter himself. By the end of his term, the President would shift from following the route supported by Vance to the harder-line advanced by Brzezinski. The discussions with the Soviets over their role in the Horn highly influenced this shift, causing the region to have a major effect on bilateral relations and ultimately the downfall of détente.

There was not necessarily anything in Ethiopia's history that would point to how it became such a focal point of the Cold War. Prior to the revolution of 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie had defined twentieth century Ethiopian history. The former Ras Tafari Makonnen, by determination, will, and happenstance, had risen through the ranks of the aristocracy and Addis Ababa bureaucracy to be declared Emperor on 3 April 1930.<sup>3</sup> As ruler of the lone never-colonised African country, the small in stature, but large in presence sovereign would soon capture the imagination of the world as the first victim of World War Two.

After the war, Washington established itself as the main international player in Addis Ababa, though this was even more an invitation from Haile Selassie than an objective of American foreign policy. Ethiopian historian, Bahru Zewde, referred to the

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<sup>3</sup> See Paul Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (London: Hurst and Co., 2000) pp, 188-228 for a thorough description of Haile Selassie's rise to power.

period of the 1950s and 1960s as “the American era.”<sup>4</sup> Not only did the United States use the base at Asmara as its main centre for intelligence gathering on the Middle East, but the two countries signed several arms agreements, giving Ethiopia one of the best equipped militaries on the African continent. The two most important treaties, signed in 1953, granted Washington use of its military bases and made provisions for military assistance to Ethiopia for a period of twenty-five years. In addition, the 1960’s saw the United States send one of its largest contingents of Peace Corps volunteers to its Horn of Africa ally, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided funding for new schools and universities.

Internally, however, Haile Selassie resisted change. While Ethiopia adopted a new constitution in 1955 that delineated the powers of Parliament and the Emperor, it essentially left intact the feudal system that had governed the country for centuries. Haile Selassie retained powerful executive authority that ensured any attempt at modernisation would have to come from him. Though he made some efforts in this direction, particularly in the field of education, the pace was slow and land reform was almost non-existent. The country remained poor and un-developed and the Emperor faced opposition from young reformers, confronting a failed coup by members of his Imperial bodyguard in 1960. Moreover, an insurgency in Eritrea began in earnest in 1961, as the province’s resentment over its loss of autonomy finally overflowed into armed rebellion. The Lion of Judah found himself unable or unwilling to address the rising antipathy in the region, concentrating instead on augmenting his already high international standing. Therefore, while the revolution of 1974 surprised many outside observers, its seeds had been planted and taken root in the previous two decades. Still, the possibility that such an

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<sup>4</sup> Zewde, Bahru. *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991*, (Oxford: James Curry, Ltd, 2001), p. 186.

impoverished peripheral country would become a Cold War hotspot was at the time a very remote idea.

The Ethiopian Revolution (described in more detail in chapter one) did not have immediate international ramifications. Though Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974, the direction of the revolution was unclear, causing the international community to remain wary of backing the wrong people. The new rulers remained rather isolationist as they consolidated power. It was not until 1977, when Somalia tried to take advantage of the chaos in Addis Ababa and invaded its neighbour, that the revolution took on a more international character as the besieged Ethiopians sought external assistance. The subsequent Soviet and Cuban intervention completed the transition from an internal revolution to a Cold War struggle.

The American response to the conflict on the Horn also served to highlight several of the more recent themes explored by Cold War historians, notably the roles of personality and ideology. The Horn tested President Carter's attempts to reassert morality as a central tenet of American foreign policy. It served as a catalyst for Carter's conversion from faith in East-West cooperation and arms control to the hard-line policy of containment favoured by most of his predecessors. The conflict also emphasised the different philosophies of Carter's advisors and demonstrated the ways in which these views affected his own outlook.

The scope of this project focuses on American policy and perceptions. The lack of Soviet documentation (as well as those of the regional players) should not hinder this discussion, however. Soviet intervention in the Horn affected détente because the United States chose to make it affect détente. Moscow acted within its understanding of the

rules. It was only in American eyes that the Soviet Union was violating détente's underlying spirit. That said, there are available documents from the USSR and East Germany relating to the Horn and translated by the Cold War International History Project in Washington, D.C.<sup>5</sup> While these files are incomplete and do not show the real policy debates within the Politburo, they are useful for assessing the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of the Ford and Carter administrations' perceptions of Soviet designs in the Horn. Additionally, Odd Arne Westad, in a recent book on superpower interventions in the Third World during the Cold War, used Soviet sources to uncover Moscow's motivations for getting involved in the Horn.<sup>6</sup> He provides the most thorough treatment of the role of the Horn in the larger Cold War and addresses the importance of the conflict in the downfall of détente, but he does not have the space to explore in depth the debates within the Carter administration.

A feeling of post-Vietnam impotence, a sense that Moscow intended to launch a new round of communist expansion, the on-going debate in US domestic political circles over the future of détente and fundamentally divergent understandings of its meaning between the United States and Soviet Union combined to pressure the Carter administration to look for leverage against the Soviets. SALT II seemed to be the obvious choice. After the crisis in the Horn, arms control was essentially all that was left of détente from the US perspective. The differing perceptions of the concept by the two superpowers doomed it to fail, but it is important to note that neither side knew this at the time. Had the United States and the Soviet Union not faced off over the Third World,

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<sup>5</sup> "New East-Bloc Evidence on the Cold War in the Third World and the Collapse of Détente in the 1970s." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, issues 8-9, Winter 1996/1997.

<sup>6</sup> Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

détente might have been prolonged. Neither side realized that it was going to disintegrate over events in places like Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, but they were aware that SALT II was unravelling, if not entirely between the two governments, then with the American public and Congress. Ultimately, if there was no arms control, there was no détente and SALT was essentially dead long before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Carter's subsequent withdrawal of the treaty from the Senate.

In the 1990s, several Cold War historians put together what came to be known as the Carter-Brezhnev Project and organized several conferences which included former government officials from both the Carter Administration and the Brezhnev government. Their aim was to discover why relations soured and détente failed during the late 1970s. Several times, the historians directed the conversation back to the importance of the Horn to superpower bi-lateral relations.<sup>7</sup> Former Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, refused to believe that it was important at all, while a number of American officials emphasised how much it poisoned the atmosphere. In addition, none of the former Soviet officials could adequately explain why former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had blatantly lied to President Carter about the existence of a Soviet General in Ethiopia, an issue which administration officials felt had seriously undermined Soviet trustworthiness at the time. The Project produced a series of papers, which were published in a volume edited by Odd Arne Westad.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, none of the chapters specifically addressed the influence of the conflict in the Horn on the fall of détente.

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<sup>7</sup> Transcripts of *the Carter-Brezhnev Project*, sponsored by the Center for Foreign Policy Development of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies Brown University, in three sessions, 22-24 October 1992, 6-9 May 1994, 23-26 March 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Westad, Odd Arne, ed. *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years*. (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

In the years of the conflict and those immediately following, books and journal articles on the Ethiopian Revolution and subsequent conflict with Somalia fell into two main categories: those that fretted over increased Soviet influence and waning American influence, and those that defended Soviet and Cuban intervention while blaming the United States for giving a “green light” to the Somali invasion of the Ogaden. Among the former are several articles published in the late 1970s in American journals such as *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *International Security*. Gerard Chaliand asserted in the spring of 1978 that the American “wait and see” policy was a good one and the Soviets were the ones who had misjudged the situation, culminating in the loss of Somalia.<sup>9</sup> In a more pessimistic but still American-focused critique, Steven David feared that the United States had suffered a major political setback on the Horn due to the Soviet ability to use “proxies” to fight there, something the Americans were unable to do. He continued that the concept of linkage was the only way for the United States to combat this.<sup>10</sup>

A contrasting interpretation was later offered by Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux. The authors argued that the “USA does bear considerable responsibility for the Somali invasion.”<sup>11</sup> They went on to defend Soviet and Cuban intervention as legal under international law and, in any event, relatively altruistic in its conception.<sup>12</sup>

Halliday and Molyneux attempted to view the conflict from the Soviet perspective as

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<sup>9</sup> Chaliand, Gerard. “The Horn of Africa Dilemma” *Foreign Policy*. Number 30 Spring 1978, pp. 116-131.

<sup>10</sup> David, Steven. “Realignment in the Horn: The Soviet Advantage” *International Security*. Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 1979, pp. 69-90.

<sup>11</sup> Halliday, Fred and Maxine Molyneux. *The Ethiopian Revolution*. (London: Verso Editions, 1981), p. 226.

<sup>12</sup> Halliday and Molyneux, p. 249.

well the Ethiopian perspective, but all scholars writing in the 70s and 80s had far more access to American political discussion than that of the Socialist countries.

Other important contributions to the literature on the subject include books written from an Ethiopian perspective. The most important of these was written by Dawit Wolde Giorgis, deputy foreign minister under the Ethiopian dictator, Mengistu Haile Miriam. He was able to give insight into the perceptions of the Ethiopian side of the conflict that can not yet be found elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> A later work by Andargachew Tiruneh also made use of Ethiopian documents to chart the causes and consequences of the Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Journalist Michela Wrong provides one of the best treatments of the Eritrean fight for independence. With extensive research and interviews of former fighters as well as former American, Soviet, and Ethiopian officials, Wrong has exposed the brutal treatment of Eritrea by Ethiopia, as well as the tragic decisions of the United States and Soviet Union as they failed to curb the excesses of the Ethiopian army in the name of Cold War one-upmanship.<sup>15</sup>

To assess the Ford administration's response to the Ethiopian Revolution, there are plenty of documents available from both the National Security Council staff and the State Department. Henry Kissinger's dual role as Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, no doubt, facilitated the high number of State Department documents found at the Ford Library. In addition, the volume of *Foreign Relations of the United States* that addresses the Ford administration's policy toward Africa was recently

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<sup>13</sup> Giorgis, Dawit Wolde. *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Tiruneh, Andargachew. *The Ethiopian Revolution: 1974-1987*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Wrong, Michela. *I Didn't Do It for You: How the World Used and Abused a Small African Nation*. (London: Harper Perennial, 2005).

released.<sup>16</sup> Telegrams back to Foggy Bottom from the American embassy in Addis Ababa paint a picture of a policy in flux as the embassy officials tried to understand the direction of the revolution, deal with kidnappings in Eritrea and withdraw from the Kagnew Communications station. Prior to Soviet involvement, however, the Horn did not create too much controversy within the administration.

On the other hand, the sparring contest between Vance and Brzezinski made headlines at the time and the two further fuelled the fire by releasing competing memoirs at the same time in the early 1980s. The National Security Advisor produced an insightfully candid chronicle of his time in the White House. He explained the mechanisms that he established to inform the President of national security issues, his ideology, and his differences with the Secretary of State.<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski's provocative statement in his memoirs that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden" must be understood, not as the single impetus for the failure of SALT II, but rather as a key element of a chain of events that led to the withdrawal of the treaty from Senate consideration. Instead of arguing that an accumulation of events led to the downfall of détente, Brzezinski maintained that it was due to a cycle of reaction and over-reaction, begun with the Horn, and brought on by the sense of weakness in the Administration, with the Soviet Brigade in Cuba debacle as a prime example. Cyrus Vance published a telling account of his time with the State Department, referring to his frustrations with Brzezinski and the struggles that led to his resignation.<sup>18</sup> He did not put as much

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<sup>16</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, (hereafter FRUS) Volume E-6, Documents on Africa, 1973-1976. Department of State Publication. Office of the Historian. Washington D.C.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/>

<sup>17</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977-1981* (New York: Farrer, Strauss & Giroux, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> Vance, Cyrus. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

emphasis on the conflict in the Horn as did Brzezinski, but this is telling in and of itself.

These memoirs provide compelling insight into the workings of the Carter administration's foreign policy team, but at that point, the conflict (both the Horn and their personal debate) was still fresh.

Now, the picture of how policy developed is much clearer with the end of the Cold War and with the availability of documents from the period. At the Carter Library, the thorough and lively papers of Paul Henze, an Ethiophile and Brzezinski's key advisor on the region, demonstrate the rather pro-Ethiopia slant that made its way to the National Security Advisor. Yet, Brzezinski did not follow that advice. Ultimately, he did not specifically care about the conflict between the countries of the Horn, only that the Soviets were involved. The availability of State Department files is less consistent, but through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from the National Archives II and the Carter-Brezhnev Project at the National Security Archive, there is enough evidence to support the notion that the State Department generally held sway on how to handle the crisis at the regional level. Unfortunately for Vance, winning this battle may have caused him to lose the larger war on determining the future course of American foreign policy.

There have been surprisingly few books written on the Carter administration's foreign policy. The opening of archives at the Carter Library and the anticipation of the de-classification of State and Defense Department documents at the National Archives have encouraged many scholars to begin that process now, and this current dearth of scholarship should completely change in the next few years. As it is, Gaddis Smith

produced one of the most relevant books on Carter's foreign policy back in 1986, though recently Robert Strong has made an important contribution to the subject.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation aims to contribute to the scholarship of 1970s détente by emphasising the Horn's role in its downfall. Raymond Garthoff provides the most comprehensive critique of détente in the revised edition of his seminal work, *Détente and Confrontation*. One of the major developments in his thinking from the first edition to the second is that he originally treated détente as an *alternative* to Cold War, but in his reassessment, he characterises it as merely a *phase* of the Cold War. The importance of this is that it turned the Cold War episodes during the 1970s into issues that *exposed* the failure of détente rather than *caused* it. Garthoff emphasised the role of the Third World in contributing to the straining of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and discussed the Carter administration's reaction to Soviet and Cuban commitment in the Horn in detail. He also made extensive use of newly available Soviet and American documents to give a two-sided picture of the disagreement. Garthoff believed it was the Cuban (seen as a Soviet proxy) involvement in Angola that first illustrated the fact that the U.S. and Soviet Union understood détente in very different terms, something which would remain evident through events in the Horn of Africa and on through the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. While he addressed the influence of each individual Third World conflict on superpower relations, he groups them together as an arc of Soviet intervention that the United States found unacceptable.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, Gaddis. *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) and Robert A. Strong. *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). In addition, see Richard C. Thornton. *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order*. (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> See Raymond Garthoff. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan, Revised Edition*. (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994).

In addition, Keith Nelson used the availability of some Soviet and American archives on the subject of détente to argue that it was not a superficial concept and that it did represent good faith on both sides. This was possibly why the “betrayal” was felt so strongly by both Carter and members of the Brezhnev government. Nelson did address the issue of Soviet activities in the Third World, but he gave them no more weight than trade issues, economics, and the role of personality.<sup>21</sup> He centred on the motivation for détente and not the ultimate failure. Mike Bowker and Phil Williams, on the other hand, acknowledged the importance of the Soviet intervention in the Horn to the debates in the United States about détente. They ultimately concluded that the resolution of the conflict and the aftermath vindicated Vance, while acknowledging that the prevailing view in Washington afterwards was that Brzezinski was right about the Soviets violating the spirit of détente.<sup>22</sup> One of those giving an academic face to this latter point of view was Harvard Professor Richard Pipes, who became a member of President Reagan’s National Security Council team. He advocated a position that dictated that the USSR involved itself in the Third World cynically to isolate the West, not out of any ideological motivation and further argued that keeping peaceful relations with the Soviet Union played right into its hands.<sup>23</sup>

In a way, Brzezinski was right about détente, not that the Soviets were violating its spirit, but that they were not meeting American expectations of it. Some advocates of détente feared that its expectations had been oversold to the American public. Even

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<sup>21</sup> See Keith Nelson. *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam*. (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Bowker, Mike and Phil Williams. *Superpower Détente: A Reappraisal*. (London: SAGE Publications, 1988), p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> Pipes, Richard. *U.S.-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 86-90.

Cyrus Vance noted in early 1977 that “Ford-Kissinger have misled us on détente.”<sup>24</sup> He realized that this would make his job more difficult.

We have been led to believe that linkages exist which do not and never did. We were led to believe that because agreements were reached in strategic arena talks, the Soviets would not compete with the U.S. in other areas. This was false. Witness what happened in Angola and the Middle east.<sup>25</sup>

The problem was that President Nixon and his national security adviser and later secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, had no choice but to oversell detente. The American public would never have accepted it unless it believed that the United States was getting more out of it than the Soviet Union was. The version they sold, however, would never have been acceptable to the USSR. Kissinger felt he could manage this, but such a contradiction could not survive a change in administration. In establishing the groundwork for détente, the United States and Soviet Union had searched for areas on which they could agree, leaving more contentious issues to be dealt with later. Mary Kaldor gives an excellent explanation as to why détente was doomed.

The détente of the 1970’s failed both because it failed to tackle the roots of the arms race *and* because it did not permit systemic evolution in *either* East or West. Moreover, détente demonstrated that the impetus for demilitarization and systemic change cannot come from above, especially in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Handwritten notebook from early 1977.” *The Cyrus Vance and Grace Sloan Vance Papers*. Box 10/ Folder 28. Archives and Manuscripts Division, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Kaldor, Mary. *The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), p. 187.

Neither the United States, nor the Soviet Union was willing to give up their competition, but both sides hoped that it could be managed. Unfortunately, they appointed themselves as referees, and certainly not un-biased ones.

This dissertation will stress several arguments. First, the conflict in the Horn of Africa was the American test case for the feasibility of détente. This has not been emphasised enough in discussions on 1970s superpower relations as the United States and Soviet Union had more urgent issues over which they disagreed. However, the documents of discussions between the major players illustrate the importance the United States put on Soviet involvement in Africa, and American willingness to raise such an unpopular issue, knowing it might undermine progress in other areas. Another subject may possibly have served this role as well, but Brzezinski and more importantly Carter chose this one.

Second, the Horn crisis served as an early part of President Carter's foreign policy education and unfortunately for détente, what he learned was that the Soviets could not be trusted. Therefore, the Horn would act as a mechanism changing Carter's attitude toward the Soviet Union to a much harder line. Though there were many steps in this education, the arguments between Vance and Brzezinski over the American response to the Soviet involvement in the Horn represented a much larger debate on the overriding strategy behind American foreign policy, which ultimately magnified the importance of the Horn.

Third, the Horn proved to the United States that the Soviet Union was not living up to the American understanding of détente and that the entire process was untenable. From the American perspective, if the Soviets could still do what they wanted in the

Third World despite loud complaints, then the only thing the United States would get out of détente was another SALT agreement, which the Soviets needed more than the Americans did. This was a difficult sell to an already sceptical Congress, a detail that Brzezinski emphasised rather vocally. ✓

Fourth, the American response to the conflict demonstrated that the United States was unable to move beyond a Cold War mindset. Détente and the failure in Vietnam had not done enough to enable American policy makers to reframe their world vision. Despite a few dissenting voices, the foreign policy establishment still viewed the whole world through the prism of competition with the Soviet Union and would do so until the disintegration of their rival.

1.) Détente  
system  
America?

Finally, and this will be explored in depth in the conclusion, hindsight proved that the whole conflict and its superpower involvement were utter disasters for all involved. There were no winners. Everybody lost. The USSR ended up supporting a brutal and ineffective ally who bled it financially and proved so unpopular abroad that it did nothing to enhance the Soviet prestige. Washington appeared to have supported a Somali invasion of Ethiopia, a mistake that ultimately served only to highlight the appearance that the United States was a vulnerable giant. The apparent lack of a plan created an image that the Carter administration had picked a fight over something arbitrary. Soviet ignorance as to the importance the US government put on the issue was in part their fault, but they might be forgiven for thinking they should take this disagreement about as seriously as the United States took Soviet objections to American actions in Chile or the Middle East. For Ethiopia, Soviet and Cuban assistance propped up a regime that terrorised its people, reorganised its agricultural system to disastrous effects in the well-

publicised famines of the 1980s and kept it one of the poorest countries in the world. Somalia lost the war and Siad Barre kept a tenuous hold on the country for another decade before warlords overthrew him. Currently, the country is a failed state. Eritrea, who came so close to defeating the Ethiopian army before the Soviet and Cuban assistance helped Mengistu beat back its rebellion had to endure more than a decade more of repression at the hands of Ethiopia. Eritrean rebels helped liberate all of Ethiopia from Mengistu, finally gaining its independence in 1992 but the two countries are now enemies divided by a disputed border.

This dissertation will tell the story chronologically, including in addition to this introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one will trace the Ford administration's response to the Ethiopian revolution. The new President was sworn into office just one month before members of the Ethiopian military deposed long-time American ally, Emperor Haile Selassie. US foreign policy, in the wake of the American withdrawal from Vietnam and ultimate fall of Saigon, was in a transition phase in its dealings with the Third World, which led to a 'wait and see' attitude toward the new regime. The relative strategic unimportance of the Horn contributed to this outlook. However, this inattention represented a few missed opportunities and played a significant part in the difficulties facing Ford's successor, when the region took on Cold War implications.

Chapter two follows the first six months of President Carter's term. The Democrat's inauguration and denunciation of Ethiopian human rights conduct roughly coincided with new Ethiopian leader, Haile Mariam Mengistu's brutal execution of the other members of the military ruling committee. The administration was concerned with

intelligence that indicated Ethiopia was reaching out to the Soviet Union for military support, but the ideological President begrudged undermining his human rights emphasis so early in his term to keep up a friendship with such a nasty regime. In addition, Soviet ally Somalia began reaching out to the United States, and the young administration rather carelessly agreed to supply arms to its new friend, just before Somalia invaded Ethiopia. In the meantime, President Carter also embarked on several missteps in its relations with the Soviet Union.

Chapter three outlines the second six months of Carter's term. The Administration was forced to suddenly back-pedal on its commitment to Mogadishu and monitor what it hoped would be the fall of the Ethiopian dictator, while still pressuring Somalia to withdraw. In a major intelligence failure for the CIA, the Soviet Union caught the United States by surprise when it began sending massive amounts of military assistance to the beleaguered Mengistu, while Fidel Castro committed Cuban troops as well. The American foreign policy team struggled to catch up to the whirlwind of events that had overtaken their ability to make policy.

Chapter four focuses on the first half of 1978, during which the debate between Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski over the American response to the crisis made headlines and dominated many discussions of foreign policy. A series of impassioned exchanges between the two men illustrated that they were arguing about more than an isolated crisis, but were actually competing for the ear of the President and the future of American foreign policy. During this period, American officials continually emphasised their concern about Moscow's actions in the Horn in bilateral meetings with Soviet officials, putting strains on other issues, most notably SALT II. Finally, the issue became

very public with Brzezinski and then President Carter implying a linkage between Soviet activity in Africa and SALT.

Chapter five begins with an ill-fated meeting between President Carter and Foreign Minister Gromyko that served as a turning point for the President's attitude toward the USSR. It then explains the fallout from that meeting and traces the subsequent chain of events that led to the withdrawal of SALT II from Senate consideration and the downfall of superpower détente. This period signalled a considerable change in the conduct of American foreign policy as Carter moved from largely heeding Vance's advice to relying increasingly on the opinion of Brzezinski. By the end of Carter's term, the United States and Soviet Union were back to fighting a full-fledged Cold War.

The events of the succeeding chapters played out in the unpredictable decade of the 1970s where relative international stability appeared to be upturned, but really was a last temporary disguise of the reality of the bipolar world. The decade began with hopes over European and superpower détente and ended with revolution in Iran, a massive Soviet military foray into Afghanistan, and a turn toward superpower confrontation. Revolution and war in the Horn of Africa would be one snag in the intricate web of international order that unravelled throughout the decade, exposing the misconceptions of the relative power of the United States and the Soviet Union, but also of the Third World.

That the 1970s represented an aberration of the Cold War was not at all obvious at the time. Both sides were suffering economically from the burdens of their arms race and the United States was mired down in an unpopular war without end in Vietnam. In response, and to the benefit of both superpowers, they had succeeded in concluding

several arms control treaties on chemical weapons, anti-ballistic missiles and nuclear arms by 1972. The United States shared some Western technology with the Soviet Union and Moscow promised to assist Washington in extracting itself from Vietnam. In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe formalised European borders, while calling for universal respect for human rights. Yet, at the same time, the superpowers' interests clashed in South Asia in 1971, Chile and the Middle East in 1973 and Angola in 1974-75. The Soviets got their desired outcome in the first, but détente was still in its youth. As the United States achieved its desired outcomes in Chile and the Middle East, Washington did not worry that it was failing to control Moscow's influence in the Third World, though the Soviet Union was clearly frustrated. Therefore, it was Angola that raised alarms in the United States that détente was not successfully reigning in the Soviet Union. Finally then, Washington used the conflict in the Horn to test whether it could force Moscow to play by its rules. Its inability to do so signalled to the United States that détente had failed. The fallout from this manifested itself in renewed Cold War on both sides which again played out to the detriment of the Third World.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Afghanistan, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada to name just a few.

## Chapter 1

### “I Hadn’t the Foggiest Idea.”

The United States considered the Horn of Africa a diplomatic backwater in the early 1970s. However, the eruption of Cold War competition for the loyalties of Ethiopia and Somalia would serve to ensure that President Gerald Ford took notice of the impoverished region. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, concisely summed up the classic Cold War paradox for the designers of American foreign policy.

Ethiopia. We have no overwhelming interest in this region, but it will be apparent that anyone (like Somalia) who relies on the Soviet Union is sustained, and anyone who relies on us is dropped when the going gets tough.<sup>1</sup>

The actions of a couple of extremely poor nations in a region that most Americans could not find on a map took on magnified importance because the US foreign policy establishment viewed all international relations through the tunnel-vision created by the Cold War. Though the post-Vietnam landscape limited the American ability and inclination to respond to Third World conflict, its debacle in Southeast Asia did not teach the United States the folly of categorizing all conflict as freedom and democracy against communism. Stuck in that mindset, American leaders learned only that they had to find means other than massive troop intervention in order to combat communist ideology. During the mid-1970s, American policy-makers tested this new approach in Africa where

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<sup>1</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation: Ford, Kissinger, and Scowcroft. 27 February 1975.” Box 9, NSA Memoranda of Conversations 1973-1977. Gerald R. Ford Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor, MI.

they attempted to control the Soviets through détente while still trying to manipulate the regional players.

However, the American response to the Ethiopian Revolution was indicative of a new way of dealing with Third World revolutions. The post-Vietnam era did create a generation (especially within the State Department) of those who were able to separate a singular socialist revolution from world-wide Soviet Communist expansionism. This recognition created a situation in which the United States could attempt to maintain positive relations with socialist countries rather than force them into the Soviet camp. This approach, however, did not work in Ethiopia because the overriding mentality of successive Presidential Administrations remained centred on confrontation with the Soviet Union. Indeed, Washington continued to supply arms to a government that disdained the United States and used those weapons to commit terrible atrocities against its people. By taking neither a principled stand, nor a hard-line containment stand, the United States allowed Ethiopia to dictate the terms of the relationship.

American Ambassador to Ethiopia, Arthur Hummel, expostulated on the American strategy (or lack thereof) toward Ethiopia in a telegram to Kissinger in November 1974.

Thus far into the Ethiopian revolution, US policy has been guided by two principles, the first is that we should not only avoid intervention in the situation, but we should try hard to avoid actions which could readily be interpreted as intervention. The second principle has been to continue all of our assistance programs at full strength in the belief that this would help to strengthen the position of those who will struggle for a continuation of close and friendly relations with the US.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Telegram from American Embassy in Addis Ababa to the Secretary of State, 25 Nov 1974." Folder: Ethiopia, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

The years of 1975 and 1976 represented the last chance to actually use military aid as an incentive to urge the Ethiopian Provisional Military Government (PMG) toward more respect for the United States and more respect for human rights. Instead, Ethiopia and Somalia were able to manipulate the superpowers to massively arm two of the poorest countries on earth and contribute to the violent decades to follow, a tragedy that persists to this day.

As is often the case, conflict arises in areas that have received relative inattention from the outside world. Having not been colonized, Ethiopia did not have a former imperial power scrutinising its internal affairs. The Soviet Union did not have extensive ties with Ethiopian Marxists. The United States did have a long history with Ethiopia under Haile Selassie and conceptualised the region as both part of Africa as well as part of the Middle East. In the mid-1970s, however, Washington's Middle Eastern focus was on the Arab-Israeli struggles and its African focus was on the battle for majority rule in southern Africa, the collapse of the Portuguese empire and eventually the Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola. (Indeed, Secretary of State Kissinger often missed relevant meetings on the Horn as he was in the midst of his shuttle diplomacy to the Middle East). With little political pressure, consistency is easier than creativity. With a lot of political pressure, the opposite is true. As the political stakes changed, so did the perceived need for action.

On 9 August 1974, while Ethiopia was in the throws of revolution, Gerald Ford was sworn in as President of the United States under dramatic circumstances. Following a tumultuous summer in the White House brought on by the Watergate imbroglio, Richard Nixon had resigned from office. President Ford was charged with the task of

attending to the healing of a nation while pledging to continue the policies of his predecessor. Domestically, the United States faced not only a public crisis of confidence in its government but was also in the midst of an economic recession. In international affairs, the recent withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam still loomed largest, despite progress in bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. To ensure some continuity in the foreign policy arena, Ford invited the always controversial Henry Kissinger to remain as both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor with James Schlesinger (whom Kissinger referred to as a “coward”)<sup>3</sup> as Secretary of Defence. Though mid-term Ford replaced Schlesinger with Donald Rumsfeld and Kissinger lost his National Security Advisor hat to Brent Scowcroft in November 1975, rifts over détente attitudes were prevalent within the administration. Still, President Ford hoped to further develop détente with the Soviet Union with a new Strategic Arms Limitation Agreement, known as SALT II. Unfortunately for Ford and Kissinger, the mid-1970s witnessed unprecedented Soviet involvement in the Third World, as tensions over Vietnam, Angola, and the Horn of Africa strained discussions on other bilateral issues.

Kissinger, the architect of American foreign policy throughout the Nixon and Ford administrations, never gave much priority to the Third World. As a proponent of grand strategy, he viewed regional issues through the lens of the larger Cold War. Thus, while he was successfully able to use back channels and personal appeals to advance relations with the Soviet Union and China, his inattention to the needs and desires of local players and his emphasis on superpower solutions to regional conflicts weakened

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<sup>3</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation Kissinger and Ford. 10 May 1976.” Box 19, NSA MemCons. GRFL.

American ability to deal with the Third World.<sup>4</sup> Though the Nixon doctrine implied that the United States would give arms and financial support to its allies in the event of regional conflict while avoiding another embroilment like Vietnam, Kissinger did not look to the local causes of such conflict, instead focussing on external influences from the communist bloc. The follies of this strategy were originally apparent in southeast and south Asia, the Middle East, and during the Ford years, in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Ford inherited a disorganised Africa policy. For President Nixon, the continent was not a high priority as he fixed his focus upon Southeast Asia and China. However, the new President initiated a more cohesive and forthcoming Africa strategy based on events on the continent as well as his own personal sense of justice for a region in the process of de-colonisation. Kissinger, in his memoirs, explained the overall approach.

However influenced by geopolitical considerations, we embarked with conviction and determination on the evolution to majority rule. [...] For us, reducing the Soviet and Cuban capacity to turn Africa into a front in the Cold War was certainly a major objective. But we could only achieve it as part of a broad policy enlisting the support of the countries of the region in terms of their own sense of priorities and values.<sup>6</sup>

This retrospective (and of course sympathetic) portrayal of the Ford administration's Africa policy acknowledged the primary concerns influencing American attitudes toward a continent involved in large-scale de-colonisation and the changes it wrought. The United States would seek to limit or undermine Soviet and Cuban inroads into Africa. Unlike his predecessors, however, President Ford proposed to do this through working

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Kissinger's attempt to have the superpowers solve the South Asian crisis in 1971, restrain their allies in the lead-up to the 1973 October War in the Middle East or relying upon the Soviets to induce its North Vietnamese ally to abide by the Paris Agreement met with little success.

<sup>6</sup> Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. (New York: Touchstone, 1999), p. 904.

closely with African leaders, risking relations with the colonial powers, traditional US allies, in order to address the longer-term objective of achieving friendly relations with African governments. The administration would achieve some success in this area, but its major aim of preventing a large-scale Soviet and Cuban presence on the continent ultimately failed, first in Angola, and later in the Horn of Africa. While Washington did seek out friendly players on the ground, it failed to understand the root of the Marxist appeal in Africa, instead blaming the Soviets and Cubans for creating problems.

The Soviet Union had gained a footing in the Horn earlier that summer. Somalia and the USSR had signed a “Treaty of Friendship” in July of 1974 which granted the Soviets use of the military base at Berbera, though Somalia initially denied that such a privilege had been granted. Somali-American relations had long been strained following Mohammed Siad Barre’s military/socialist revolution in 1969 and his subsequent overtures to Cuba and North Vietnam. The United States had discovered in 1970 that Somali ships were doing business with Hanoi. A stipulation of the Foreign Assistance Act of that year dictated that the United States could not continue aid to countries trading with North Vietnam so the State Department and USAID began to phase out their assistance programs for Mogadishu.<sup>7</sup> This served to escalate the Cold War in the Horn.

As the Ford administration struggled to make sense of Ethiopia’s internal situation, it would also contend with several other regional issues. The fate of Haile Selassie was of immediate worry. Members of the deposed Emperor’s family and his friends in the United States pressured the President to use his influence to ensure his welfare and release. Later in his term, Eritrean rebels raided American facilities in

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<sup>7</sup> “Telegram from the American Embassy in Mogadishu to the Secretary of State 10 May 1970.” Box 2, NSC Vietnam Information Group: Intelligence and Other Reports, 1967-1975. GRFL.

Asmara and took several hostages, including two Americans, forcing media and congressional attention on the region once again. The largest concern, predictably, for the administration's policy toward the region was the growing Soviet presence, first in Somalia, but in Ethiopia as well. Ford and Kissinger had to balance the aforementioned issues with decisions on arms supplies to the region, compromised by blatant human rights violations and new Congressional restrictions on arms sales. Unfortunately for all involved, but especially for Ethiopians and Somalis, the United States missed a couple of chances to change the course of events for the Horn.

### **The Ethiopian Revolution**

A succession of events in 1973 and 1974 had incited a revolution in Ethiopia, which ultimately toppled the *ancien régime*. The year that saw Emperor Haile Selassie celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday also witnessed widespread famine, highly publicized by the western press. The government's subsequent efforts to downplay the extent of the calamity fomented unrest among the intellectual classes. In early 1974, the skyrocketing price of petroleum caused another crisis, causing taxi drivers to go on strike. Separately, members of the army began to demand higher pay. In Addis Ababa, students demonstrated and labour unions marched against the Imperial government.

In the midst of the chaos, a group of low to mid level army officers formed a coordinating committee for the armed forces that came to be known as the Derg.<sup>8</sup> They held central meetings in Addis Ababa with military units from around the country sending delegates. The organisation operated secretly and gradually gained power by taking advantage of the inertia of the aristocracy and senior military officials. Atnafu

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<sup>8</sup> 'Derg' is a word for 'committee' derived from the archaic language Ge'ez.

Abate, Teferi Bante, Aman Andom and Mengistu Haile Mariam became the dominant Derg figures. The group took on the motto *Ityopya Tikdem* which translates to “Ethiopia First,” a vaguely nationalist theme with little ideology. The Derg acted to undermine the Emperor by blaming the famine on him and eventually recruited the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church to endorse the revolution at the end of August 1974. Afterwards, their position was secure enough to arrest the emperor.<sup>9</sup>

On 12 September 1974, following months of violent upheaval, Haile Selassie was deposed from his throne after nearly a half-century in power, driven away from his palace unceremoniously in a Volkswagen.<sup>10</sup> The Derg took over the running of the country, embarking on a brutal consolidation of power, while confounding the outside world as to its ideology. Despite being military in nature, this seizure of power was not a mere coup. It was a true revolution, annihilating the old order, and undermining the complicated feudal system of land ownership. Still, as the Derg was a large, loosely-knit organisation without a clear leader, the direction of the revolution remained unclear.

The new Ethiopian leaders inherited an insurgency in the northern province of Eritrea. Having had a largely separate history from Ethiopia, including far more contact with the outside world through its Italian colonists, Asmara believed itself more sophisticated than the coarse and brutal rule dictated from Addis Ababa. Rebels there had been fighting for independence since 1961. The Marxist Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Muslim Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) lead the insurgency that

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the Ethiopian Revolution, see Haile-Selassie, Teferra. *The Ethiopian Revolution: 1974-1991*. (London: Kegan Paul Intl., 1997), Dawit Wolde Giorgis. *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989), or Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux. *The Ethiopian Revolution*.

<sup>10</sup> For a wonderful book on the court activities in the waning days of Haile Selassie’s regime, see the account by the Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski. *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat*. (London: Quartet Books, 1983).

would require immense resources for Ethiopia to combat.<sup>11</sup> Handling this uprising would ultimately expose some of the fissures in the deeply secretive Derg as well as drive the Ethiopian desperation for arms, first from the United States and later from the Soviet Union.

The Derg also inherited most of the same foreign policy difficulties of the imperial regime, namely that Ethiopia was a Christian country in a region dominated by Islamic ones. Somalia, one of those Islamic states, had designs on Ethiopian territory and the Arab neighbours to the North supported its claim. Many of those same countries also championed the Muslim insurgents in Eritrea. As such, Ethiopia felt under siege. Without friendly countries in the region, the Derg necessarily looked outside to the superpowers for military assistance. The rhetoric of the new Ethiopian leaders had always been rabidly anti-American and as its leaders searched for an intellectual basis to their revolution, it became increasingly Marxist. Naturally, the Derg preferred an alliance with the Soviet Union, a country that both served as a model of rapid development and had little association with the previous regime. However, the United States was still the source of Ethiopian military equipment and Addis Ababa could not afford to completely alienate Washington until it found another supplier.

Prior to the revolution, Ethiopia had been a feudal country, which made transforming the way its government operated an imperative. As such, the overthrow of the Imperial regime achieved mass popular appeal. However, most of those with the ability to implement change had not thought beyond the initial seizure of power leaving the direction of the revolution unclear to both internal and external observers. Of the

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<sup>11</sup> For more on Eritrea, see Roy Pateman. *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning, Revised Edition*. (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1990) and David Pool. *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd., 2001).

intellectuals who stepped in to fill this void, most of whom had been largely educated in the Europe and the United States, those that spoke the language of Marxism were more persuasive than those who valued Ethiopian relations with Washington. Still, the education of the Derg took enough time that the United States continued to hold out hope that it would not lose this regional ally while the Soviet Union remained cautious of the new rulers. Indeed, as it was not even clear who really held the power within the Derg and different factions wrestled for control of the foreign policy, the superpowers received such mixed messages that neither jumped in to take advantage of the chaos.

### **The Formation of an Ethiopia Policy**

After the overthrow of Haile Selassie, the upper echelon of the American foreign policy establishment found itself completely in the dark as to the current situation in Ethiopia. Henry Kissinger, in a State Department staff meeting on 16 October 1974, joked about his ignorance on the subject exposed in a discussion with the Egyptian President, “[Anwar] Sadat asked me what I thought of developments in Ethiopia, and I said I hadn't the foggiest idea; and he didn't believe me. He thought I was hiding out, hiding from him.”<sup>12</sup> As such, before the United States could develop a meaningful policy toward the new Ethiopian regime, it needed to understand the revolution. This, however, was an extremely difficult task as the revolutionaries were not a group united in either approach or ideology. Indeed, there was not yet a clear leader of the PMG. At Kissinger's request, the CIA attempted to assess the Ethiopian situation in a 15 October 1974 memorandum titled, “Ethiopia: the Unfinished Revolution.” The intelligence on the situation at the

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<sup>12</sup> “Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, Washington, 16 October 1974” Document 115, Volume E-6, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/>

time was very thorough and well-developed. The authors understood the precarious position of the titular prime minister, Aman Andom, and they believed no single leader was strong enough to make a grab for power at this time. They also understood the divisions in the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee between moderates who promoted a gradual move toward civilian government and land reform without total nationalization and the radicals who promoted an immediate move toward civilian rule and restructuring Ethiopia as a socialist country.

In terms of foreign policy, the CIA analysts recognized that the PMG would likely continue to look to the United States as its arms supplier, though members of the Derg had already approached Moscow to inquire about purchasing Soviet arms. The authors concluded that “we believe that the moderates will stay reasonably united, however, and retain control of the revolution, at least in the short term. They will attempt to carry out political and economic change a step at a time guided by pragmatism rather than ideology.”<sup>13</sup> It was this prognosis for the future that proved horribly optimistic in light of the events that took place a week later.

On 23 October 1974, in what became known as the Saturday Night Massacre, the increasingly powerful and undeniably brutal Mengistu Haile Miriam convinced his allies to kill the official Head of State, Aman Andom, and as many as sixty political prisoners from the former imperial regime. (Mengistu had disliked Aman’s plan for peace and reconciliation with Eritrea). As much as the Ford Administration might have wished to maintain positive relations with the new Ethiopian government, exemplified by its willingness to disregard the Derg’s strong anti-American rhetoric, the State Department

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<sup>13</sup> “Memorandum on Ethiopia: the Unfinished Revolution 15 Oct. 1974” CREST, National Archives II. (NAII) College Park, MD.

did not want to appear as a supporter of the government's tactics. The United States was alarmed by what it saw as the radicalisation of the revolution, but hoped to maintain a presence as encouragement to more moderate forces. The embassy's initial reaction to the events was a measured assessment.

We expect the "radicals" in the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee (AFCC) to exercise greater power in the new stage, however long or short it may be, but it is still difficult to foresee what form their radicalism will take. A key issue in this respect is whether the present leadership will wish to retain the traditional close relationship with the US or will turn to the Soviets and/or Chinese for military assistance. While it will probably be desirable to continue US assistance programs at normal levels, we intend to avoid for the moment conclusion of new agreements pursuant to those programs lest they be misread as a sign of approval or indifference to the Saturday Night Massacre.<sup>14</sup>

Though unwilling to give the Derg more incentive to turn to the Soviets for military support, a combination of factors kept the Administration from reaching out directly to the new government. First, Washington strongly wished to avoid appearing to condone blatant human rights violations (though this was obviously not a point of consistency). Second, Ford and Kissinger had a larger plan for the continent, and the Derg was not popular in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Under Secretary of State for African Affairs, Donald Easum noted that "It's of interest that 14 African leaders have publicly expressed themselves in opposition to the killings. This is a change. Generally, Africans don't criticize other Africans."<sup>15</sup> Finally, American intelligence reports indicated that the

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<sup>14</sup> "Telegram to Sec of State from Embassy in Addis Ababa. 25 Nov. 1974." Folder: Ethiopia, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>15</sup> "Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, Washington, December 5, 1974, 8:00 a.m." Document 121, Vol. E-6, FRUS.

government was one misstep away from failing, discouraging the administration from developing further ties to the junta.

The belief that the PMG was increasingly unpopular in Ethiopia led Washington's approach to Ethiopia. The State Department surmised that "the present leadership's intentions in the fields of rural education and the Eritrean insurgency contributed to making its continued tenure uncertain."<sup>16</sup> The Ford Administration faced a choice between continuing the massive arms supplies of the Haile Selassie years to allow the PMG to fight its Eritrean insurgents, or to cease arm shipments to the increasingly violent and unpopular regime. Altogether, State Department officials argued that while the former had the purpose of staving off Ethiopian need to seek supplies from the Soviets or Chinese, the second option could signal to PMG opponents that the United States would be receptive to an overthrow of the government. A third course of action, which would essentially be followed by both Ford and Carter in his first year, attempted to walk a fine line between the two. The United States would continue with *qualified* arms sales, contingent upon the regime's good behaviour.<sup>17</sup> This way the administration could avoid losing its presence in Ethiopia, positioning Washington to act should there be a change in government.

The administration's choice was also dictated by new Congressional restrictions on military aid to Africa. Representative Dante Fascell (D-FL) in an address to the House floor in February 1975, called the Ethiopian request for \$30 million in military supplies "an excellent opportunity to test the recent statements by President Ford and Secretary Kissinger urging a new spirit of cooperation between the executive and the

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<sup>16</sup> "Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from the State Department. 18 Dec. 1974." Folder: Ethiopia, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL. (Underlined in original).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Congress in the area of foreign policy.”<sup>18</sup> As Kissinger lamented to Ford, “You are now paying for the days of Johnson and Nixon. Everywhere we are turning up a bit short.”<sup>19</sup> In that same conversation, the Secretary noted that “Sadat once asked me why we weren’t aiding Ethiopia. He said they’re creating a Soviet satellite there if we don’t give them arms. I told him there was a \$40 million Congressional ceiling on arms aid to all of Africa. He couldn’t believe it.”<sup>20</sup> While these limits constrained American manoeuvrability, they also provided a convenient excuse for the US government to limit its arms shipments. American embassy officials in Addis Ababa were free to lament to Ethiopian leaders that Congress had tied their hands, while still appearing to make a concerted effort to support the Derg’s defensive needs.

Despite this, the Ethiopians persisted in pressuring the Americans to continue with promised arms deals. As a result, the administration needed to construct a policy to deal with the PMG. At the core of Washington’s considerations on the arms issue was Ethiopia’s strategic location. A State Department issue paper from late 1974 asserted, “our perception of Ethiopia’s strategic importance was a significant factor in our favourable response to the Ethiopian request for additional arms.”<sup>21</sup> The Departments of State and Defense decided to keep the arms in the pipeline flowing smoothly, but unbeknownst to the Ethiopians, would review each shipment on a case by case basis. Under-Secretary Easum, argued that this path would put the onus on Ethiopia to maintain positive relations, as shipments would be based on good behaviour by the PMG. This

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<sup>18</sup>Fascell Dante. “Ethiopian Arms Request: Litmus Test of Congressional Executive Foreign Policy Cooperation.” *The Congressional Record*. 25 February 1975.

<sup>19</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between the President, Kissinger, and Scowcroft, 12 Nov 1974.” Box 2, NSA MemCons, 1973-1977. GRFL.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Issue Paper on Ethiopia.” Box 2, NSAPCF. GRFL.

would apply to economic aid as well. Easum also hoped that Ethiopia would be mollified by the support and would have no reason to seek aid from the USSR or China as the regime implied it would.<sup>22</sup> (It is unclear how the Ethiopians were to know its shipments would be based on good behaviour if they weren't told about the review). Kissinger, in particular, fretted that the Derg's radical turn and the events of the Saturday Night Massacre, were directly related to American reluctance to support the more moderate elements of the regime. In a meeting in early January, he wondered, "I would like to find out for my own education what the forces were that produced this [takeover by the radicals]; but also with special attention to whether any American actions in our judgment in retrospect contributed to it."<sup>23</sup> Of course, the Secretary of State, too, hoped to use this as an example of the liability of Congressional ceilings on aid.

Domestic pressures also affected American attitudes toward the regime. During Haile Selassie's long reign, he had made many powerful friends in the United States. Members of Congress lobbied for his safe care, appealing directly to the Derg. The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) reassured the American Embassy on 2 December 1974 that "the PMAC *has never contemplated* to execute the ex-emperor, and [he] is receiving humane treatment."<sup>24</sup> (Indeed, the members of the Derg did not execute Haile Selassie until September 1975). The Crown Prince of Ethiopia, in exile in England, delivered a letter to the American Embassy in London requesting assistance in liberating Ethiopia from the "reign of terror" initiated by "mutineers."<sup>25</sup> The State

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<sup>22</sup> "Memorandum to Kissinger from Donald Easum. 24 Dec 1974." Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>23</sup> "Secretary's Staff Meeting Friday, January 3, 1975" Document 125, Volume E-6, FRUS.

<sup>24</sup> "Telegram from American Embassy in Addis Ababa to Sec of State. 2 Dec 1974." Folder: Ethiopia-State Telegrams to SECSTATE EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GFRL. (Italics are mine).

<sup>25</sup> "Letter from Crown Prince of Ethiopia, Asfa Wossen, to President Ford. 30 Mar. 1975." Box 17, CO 48: Ethiopia, WHCF. GRFL.

Department, however, did not take the letter seriously (in part because it was a form letter) and though the American embassy in Addis Ababa raised the issue of the former Emperor's well-being with the Derg, the US government continued to hope for normal relations with the PMG.

In addition, the US press began to question the ethics of continuing to supply Ethiopia with arms which the PMG used against Eritrean insurgents. Journalists on the ground in Asmara documented the massive human rights violations perpetrated by the Ethiopian military. One such article pointed out the use of massacre as a "technique of subjugation."<sup>26</sup> Dan Connell, in his first of a series of articles for the *Washington Post*, portrayed his remarkable journey from Addis Ababa to Asmara with a convoy of the Ethiopian Territorial army. He painted a vivid picture of "unsmiling conscripts" looking at us "from between the wooden slats of World War II surplus American trucks" cradling "U.S. made M-14 rifles in their laps." He described the reason for the barren landscape, "since the army holds the local population responsible for guerrilla attacks, the villages along this section of the road were deserted. As people learned of our approach, they melted into the desert to avoid trouble."<sup>27</sup> Though this publicity was not front page news, the American government, post-Vietnam, was more sensitive to appearing on the wrong side of a conflict.

The White House viewed these developments in Ethiopia with an eye to larger geopolitical considerations and the year 1975 saw what seemed to be a monumental shift in favour of the Soviet Union in its Cold War with the United States, particularly in the

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<sup>26</sup> Torgerson, Dial. "Should U.S. Resupply Ethiopia?" *The Los Angeles Times*. 23 February 1975. CREST. NAII.

<sup>27</sup> Connell, Dan. "War Signs Seen in Ethiopia." *The Washington Post*. 13 May 1976. *Taking on the Superpowers: Collected Articles on the Eritrean Revolution. Vol 1.* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2003).

Third World. In March of that year, North Vietnam, ignoring the Paris Agreement, launched a major offensive into South Vietnam. The US Congress, with Democrats in the majority, voted overwhelmingly against any further assistance to Saigon and the American War in Vietnam ended on 30 April with humiliating final images of the frantic helicopter evacuation of the American embassy. In Europe, the European Security Conference concluded in Helsinki in July 1975 effectively accomplishing the long sought after Soviet goal of recognition of the de facto post-war borders. The Helsinki Accords, in the long run, contributed to the end of the Cold War, but at the time, it appeared another Soviet success, albeit not necessarily an American failure.<sup>28</sup>

to what?

Finally, after a coup in Portugal in 1974, the new government in Lisbon looked to speedily decolonise and rid itself of a great financial burden. Though all of its former colonies were left to struggle, Angola would become the biggest fodder for Cold War competition. The Alvor agreement of January 1975 stipulated that its three main revolutionary movements would share power at independence that November. However, a civil war quickly broke out and the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, and South Africa all took sides. Cuban troops, with Soviet financial backing, arrived that summer to assist the Marxist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in seizing control of the capital, Luanda, and declaring Angolan independence in 1975, successfully marginalizing the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and

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<sup>28</sup> Many historians, including John Lewis Gaddis and Raymond Garthoff, argue that the Human Rights clause of the Helsinki Accords ultimately opened the door for dissidence in the Soviet Union. Even Henry Kissinger himself admits, though he thought the conference unimportant at the time, the unanticipated consequences contributed to the end of the Cold War. See John Gaddis, *The Cold War*, pp. 189-192, Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 631 and Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p 635. Also, it was more a European success, but given the context here, the Soviet-American competition is what is relevant.

the Union for the Total Independence for Angola (UNITA), both backed by the United States.<sup>29</sup>

The conflict in Angola had detrimental effects on détente. First, the scale of the intervention on the part of Cuba and the Soviet Union alarmed the West as the communist countries displayed their resolve in assisting fledgling Marxist movements. Their intervention demonstrated to Kissinger and the United States that his back channel diplomacy and appeals of restraint to Moscow were ineffective when it came to dealing with the Third World. The US Congress, still exhausted from Vietnam and the secrecy of the Nixon years, voted to put a ceiling on aid from the United States, further frustrating the White House. Even fierce anti-communists and opponents of détente, such as Senator Jackson, voted against supporting the anti-Soviet parties. Ford and Kissinger chose covert action to support the groups, though it would not be enough and that program too would eventually lose its mandate. The Secretary of State rationalised this American action as necessary despite the principles of détente.

The President and I briefly discussed the relationship of our actions to our détente policy. I argued that détente enabled us to be tough on issues involving important national interests because it gave the Soviet Union an incentive “to keep its head down” when challenged. Whatever the theory, however, the die was now cast, and we set our program into motion.<sup>30</sup>

Both the United States and the Soviet Union were determined to not let détente undermine their designs on the hearts and minds of the Third World. As Washington did not achieve its desired outcome in Angola, it searched for a way to ensure that the next

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<sup>29</sup> The best book on the internationalization of the conflict in Angola is Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 809.

conflict turned in its favour. The American press also took notice of Soviet activities in Africa and linked it to SALT. President Ford was asked about the connection in several White House press conferences. For example, one reporter asked, “Mr. President, now that the Soviet Union is persisting--despite what the Congress did on our side--in pouring equipment and material into Angola, do you see now the possibility that this might seriously harm any chance for a completion of SALT II?”<sup>31</sup> Ford replied, “The persistence of the Soviet Union in Angola with a hundred million dollars or more worth of military aid certainly doesn't help the continuation of détente.”<sup>32</sup> In this atmosphere, the White House approached Ethiopia with growing concern and determination not to end up with another Angola.

### **Continuing Arms for Ethiopia**

In September of 1975, the CIA again addressed the subject of Ethiopia. Assessing the year since Haile Selassie's overthrow (and shortly before the Derg executed him), it concluded that the United States continued to hold some advantage. The Agency was well aware that most members of the Derg wished to sever ties with the United States, but refrained from doing so because the Eritrean insurgency left them reliant upon the arms pipeline. However, in what would prove to be a serious miscalculation, the analysts also believed that “it is doubtful that either the Soviet Union or China would be willing or able to meet Ethiopia's needs.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, American determination to continue the arms shipment ensured that this assessment was not tested for another year and a half.

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<sup>31</sup> “The President's News Conference. 20 December 1975.” *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> “Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. 8 Sept 1975.” CREST. NAI.

Regional leaders, for their part, helped fuel American fears of Soviet inroads into the Third World. President Jaafar Nimeiri of Sudan decided to throw his lot in with the United States after an early flirtation with the Communist bloc. Instrumental in the release of the American hostages taken by the Eritrean insurgents, the White House rewarded him with an invitation in the summer of 1976. Without a touch of irony, Nimeiri asked President Ford for American assistance in seeking the “elimination of foreign influence.”<sup>34</sup> Nimeiri’s stance on the Horn was “if we leave Ethiopia alone, they will be dominated by the Communists.”<sup>35</sup> He stressed that preventing this should be an American priority. Likewise, President Sadat of Egypt and King Khalid and Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia joined with Nimeiri to impress upon Washington the importance of keeping communist influence at bay. The last thing any of them needed was a threat to their sovereignty.

Additionally, there were those within the US government advocating a much harder line against the rulers in Addis Ababa. Though his recommendations were ultimately ignored, in July 1976, the departing Ambassador Arthur Hummel left a series of suggestions for protecting American interests in the region. He advocated blunt honesty claiming that “normal diplomatic language does not produce desired effects on hard-nosed Ethiopians.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, he advised that American officials make their objections to the Derg’s tactics widely and loudly known. Finally, though he warned of over-reacting to the PMG’s brutal repression, the ambassador acknowledged that there may come a time that American-Ethiopian relations would be beyond redemption and the

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<sup>34</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation. President Ford and Sudanese President Nimeiri. 10 June 1976.” Box 19, NSA MemCons. GRFL.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Telegram 7985 From the Embassy in Ethiopia to the Department of State, July 6, 1976” Document 162, Vol. E-6, FRUS.

United States would have to consider retaliation against the regime.<sup>37</sup> However, the telegram did not ever translate into actual policy as most American officials still believed that the Derg would soon fail, in which case, the United States could seamlessly recreate its former influence in Addis Ababa.

By the summer of 1976, some members of Congress began to pay special attention to events on the Horn. The murder of Haile Selassie, the American hostages in Eritrea and the Soviet presence in Berbera raised the profile of the Horn in the eye of Capitol Hill. Representative Les Aspin (D-WI), later Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, addressed the House floor to draw attention to the PMG's political prisoners.

The executive branch always argues that arms sales are advantageous, because they give us leverage with foreign governments. Our sales to Ethiopia fiscal year 1976 have totalled \$109.4 million. If this leverage truly exists, then we should use it to help persuade the Government of Ethiopia to grant fair and speedy trials to political prisoners.<sup>38</sup>

He raised this issue of using the threat of a cut in military aid as a tool in dealing with uncooperative leaders, an idea that would be addressed in the usual hearings by the Appropriations Committees on foreign and military aid packages, but also in a special hearing on the Horn by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. For the former, the CIA did a new assessment of the situation.

At this point, the intelligence analysts recognized that Major Mengistu was the de facto leader and the impetus for the Derg's leftward turn. However, they failed to realize his utter ruthlessness, believing instead that his bid for personal power would lead to yet

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Aspin, Les. "Ethiopia Continues to intern political prisoners without prospect of a fair trial." *The Congressional Record*. 24 August, 1976.

another round of manoeuvring among the Derg's leaders. The assessment also addressed the impending independence of the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (FTAI), later Djibouti, and the fear that Somalia would attempt to occupy this small territory because of its large percentage of ethnic Somalis. Finally, the CIA understood that war was possible if not likely between Ethiopia and Somalia and that if this occurred the "the Soviets would have little choice but to support their client in Mogadiscio." "In the event of war with Somalia," the report concluded, "Addis Ababa would almost certainly ask for additional US military assistance."<sup>39</sup>

The subcommittee for African Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held its own hearings on the Ethiopian situation in August 1976, inviting a mix of academics and State Department officials. Those who testified agreed on a number of issues in their assessment of the state of affairs, but varied widely in their prescriptions. All were aware that the Ethiopians were abusing their American-supplied arms and committing illegal acts against Eritrean insurgents, but this sparked differing responses. Professor Donald Levine of the University of Chicago argued that the United States should continue its military assistance to Ethiopia, but to use cutbacks to pressure the Derg. His assumption that the Soviets were so firmly entrenched in Somalia gave him the certainty that Ethiopia was dependent upon American aid. He pointed out, as well, that he more often heard the complaint from Ethiopians that the United States interferes too little rather than too much.<sup>40</sup> The latter point affected the approach of both the Ford and Carter Administrations and their approach to Ethiopia. It was indicative of the split

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<sup>39</sup> "DCI Briefing for Senate Appropriations Committee. Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. 7 May 1976." CREST, NAIL.

<sup>40</sup> "Hearings before the subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations. U.S. Senate. 4-6 Aug 1976." (afterwards A/A SCFR) Y4 F76/2 Et3. p. 6. National Archives I. Washington, D.C.

in Ethiopian society between those who had old ties with the United States and those who negatively associated the United States with the Imperial regime. As it was unclear who would win the power struggle, the American government was at a loss as to where it actually stood.

The committee hearing also brought out great discussion on Ethiopia's place in global politics. Most of the participants believed Ethiopia was more of a Middle Eastern State than an African State. Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) got those testifying to agree that Ethiopia was integral to the survival of Israel, though Professor Thomas Farer of Rutgers Law School argued in opposition to the others' notion that an independent Eritrea would hinder Israeli commerce on the Red Sea.<sup>41</sup> Former Ambassador to Ethiopia, Edward Korry, put it most succinctly when he argued that Ethiopia's issues of territorial integrity related to Africa, while Cold War concerns for the region were Middle Eastern by nature.<sup>42</sup> Many of the questions by the committee members were clearly influenced by domestic politics, but the discussion did serve to demonstrate American thinking on its global priorities: Cold War first, Middle East next, and Africa last.

In keeping with some of the more visible breaks in the 1970s with the Cold War mindset, Professor Farer highlighted the difference between adopting radical Socialist development strategies and adoption of a pro-Soviet position, arguing that rarely does any Third World nationalist aspire to be a Soviet puppet.<sup>43</sup> Also, in support of Eritrea, Representative Henry Reuss (D-WI) submitted testimony and letters promoting the ending of military assistance to Ethiopia. Reuss had become involved as one his

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<sup>41</sup> Eritrea made up Ethiopia's entire coast line and an independent Eritrea would mean that the Red Sea was entirely surrounded by Muslim countries, though it was not clear that Eritrea would automatically join the others in refusing to recognise Israel.

<sup>42</sup> A/A SCFR. p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> A/A SCFR. p. 91.

constituents, James Harrell was among those kidnapped from the Kagnev Communications Station in Asmara and held by the EPLF. Reuss advocated negotiating with the Eritreans.<sup>44</sup> The hearings did have the effect of encouraging new thinking on the appeal of socialism to Third World countries. Senator Dick Clark (D-IA), the chair of the subcommittee, seemed to realize in an exchange with Professor Farer that the communist model of rapid development might appeal to a Third World country but would nevertheless place national concerns before communist concerns.<sup>45</sup> Certainly in the case of Ethiopia, the essentially feudal system of land ownership was so complicated that the only way to deal with it might have been to nationalize all private holdings before redistributing them to the population. The understanding that communism was not a monolith contributed to the cautious American approach to the region. Unfortunately, containment was too firmly entrenched in the bureaucracy of the US government for this understanding to translate into any radical change in policy.

The hearings' conclusions consisted of reasons for and against continued aid, with the "fors" coming out on top. The arguments for continuation were to keep Eritrea in Ethiopian hands to keep the Mandab Strait open for Israeli commerce, the possibility that Ethiopia could change course and return to the fold of American influence, and lessening the incentive for Ethiopia to seek Soviet assistance. So, the committee recommended that the United States use aid reduction but continuation as incentive to manipulate the situation.

The administration followed the suggested course of action, though it was already its inclination. Unfortunately, the Departments of Defense and State mishandled the

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<sup>44</sup> A/A SCFR. p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> A/A SCFR. p. 92.

message behind the reductions. First of all, the United States lost the moral high ground. The reasons against aid, i.e. the current anti-American atmosphere in Ethiopia and the cruel human rights abuses, were swept away because of larger geo-political considerations. Moreover, there wasn't enough aid to induce Mengistu to change his behaviour.<sup>46</sup> This moment in time would prove to be the last chance to use the promise of military aid as an incentive for improved relations before the rapid changes in alignment of the following year.

Though the CIA had provided a good assessment of the Ethiopian Revolution, its prognosis proved terribly off the mark. The United States was certainly not in an interventionist mood after the end of its war in Vietnam and was loathe to involve itself in another Third World debacle. As well, the horrible abuse of human rights by the Derg was incentive enough to avoid aiding the regime. However, the American 'wait and see' attitude was based on some false assumptions, mainly that the revolution or at least Mengistu himself would fail. Incorrectly, American intelligence concluded that the United States was the only country capable of meeting the needs of Ethiopia's army, therefore Washington believed it could use the arms shipments to control Ethiopian behaviour. Congress, too, recommended that the administration use reduced consignments to curb Ethiopia's excesses. Unfortunately, the reductions had the opposite effect as Mengistu increasingly asserted his independence.

### **Shifting Relations with Somalia**

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<sup>46</sup> In his memoirs, Dawit Wolde Giorgis mentioned that he and others in the foreign ministry felt that by withdrawing from Kagnaw and reducing aid, the United States was abandoning them. Giorgis, p. 35.

Despite the Treaty of Friendship signed between Somalia and the Soviet Union, the United States had reason to hope that Soviet influence could be mitigated in the region by relying on Mohammed Siad Barre's relationships with fellow Muslim leaders in the region. In early August 1974, President Sadat of Egypt indicated to the American Ambassador that he believed that Siad Barre could be weaned off Soviet reliance. He intended to make a concerted effort to improve Egyptian-Somali relations and thought the United States should make its own overtures. Sadat had faith in Siad Barre, calling him "a well-intentioned man."<sup>47</sup> Yet, neither Washington nor Moscow ultimately trusted the Somali leader as he deliberately played them off of each other.

However, in the autumn of 1974, Somalia began reaching out to the United States, opening to the Ford administration the chance to get a foothold in a country still believed to be within the Soviet domain. During a press conference in late August, President Ford had, in response to a question about Diego Garcia, referred to three Soviet naval bases in Indian Ocean, one of which was Berbera. The Somalis vehemently denied that this was the case, and used the occasion to attack American military assistance to Ethiopia.<sup>48</sup> Siad Barre, then visiting New York to address the United Nations, requested a visit with President Ford. Kissinger recommended that the two presidents meet. Not only was Siad Barre the current President of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and therefore a potential asset to advancing US interests on the continent, the Secretary of State saw an opportunity to woo Mogadishu away from the USSR. Kissinger observed that "the independent-minded Somalis are chafing somewhat under Soviet heavy-handedness and

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<sup>47</sup> "Telegram from American Ambassador in Egypt to HAK 13 Aug 1974." Folder: Middle East, Box 6, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>48</sup> "Presidential Preparation for meeting with President Mohammed Siad Barre of Somalia, 11 Oct. 1974." Folder: Somalia (1), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

profess to want to improve relations with the United States and other Western countries to reduce dependence on the Soviets.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, this meeting could provide an opportunity for Ford to demonstrate to both African and African-American leaders, the administration’s concern for the continent’s peace and stability.

With these considerations in mind, President Ford agreed to meet Siad Barre in October 1974. To build upon the Secretary’s arguments, State Department officials outlined four main objectives for the meeting. First, they wanted to encourage Siad Barre’s reported inclination toward resisting further Soviet involvement in Somalia. Second, they hoped to express concern for Soviet involvement in the Indian Ocean while reassuring the Somali President that the American base at Diego Garcia was limited in purpose. Third, they would emphasise that arms assistance to Ethiopia was purely defensive and not aimed at Somalia. Finally, they wished to reaffirm their commitment to peaceful de-colonisation in southern Africa.<sup>50</sup>

The last point raised several on-going issues for the United States and the OAU. The White House was attempting to support majority rule in Rhodesia and expressed dismay at the South African occupation of Namibia. Ford also professed support for a peaceful transition of power in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola, though Washington was keen to ensure that this transition occurred with the minimum of disruption to Western interests. In light of this, Ford received Siad Barre on 11 October, and they covered a range of issues raised by the Somali leader. As leader of the OAU, Siad Barre was interested in the American perceptions of events in Africa. However, he

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<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum for the President from Henry Kissinger on Proposed Meeting with Siad Barre 3 Oct 1974.” Folder Somalia (1), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum for the President from Robert Ingersoll on meeting with President Siad Barre, 10 Oct 1974.” Folder Somalia (1), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

also felt the need to bring up the Arab-Israeli conflict, demonstrating how much Somalia considered itself part of the Middle East. Finally, he repeatedly stressed his nation's non-alignment, attempting to reassure the Americans that he merely needed the Soviet money for development projects.<sup>51</sup> The meeting had the effect of opening dialogue between the two countries and prompted Ford to re-consider the issue of aid for Somalia.

Despite this progress, Soviet involvement in Somalia came to the forefront again the following spring when the *New York Times* ran an article claiming that the Pentagon had confirmed the Soviets were storing long-range guided missiles at its Naval Support facility in Berbera. The Defense Intelligence Agency had satellite photos illustrating that there was a storage facility for such missiles, but analysts were still uncertain as to whether there were any actually stored there. Also, the American government had reason to believe that there was a split in opinion within the Somali government as to the role the Soviets should play in the country. Arab allies were putting a lot of pressure on Somalia to reject the Soviet presence.<sup>52</sup> Much to the chagrin of his counterpart at the State Department, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger showed these satellite photos to Congress when he testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee in June. Siad Barre was reportedly "stung" by the characterization of Somalia as a Soviet pawn. To prove the allegations were false, he invited Congress to send a delegation to view all of the sites in the photographs.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Telegram from Secretary of State to the American Embassy in Mogadishu, 21 Oct. 1974." Folder (Somalia-STATE telegrams), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>52</sup> "Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from Hal Horan on Soviet Cruise Missiles in Somalia, 7 April 1975." Folder: Somalia (2), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>53</sup> "Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from the Department of State on request by Somali ambassador for appointment with the President, 3 July, 1975." Folder: Somalia (2), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

Siad Barre's invitation was accepted and a congressional delegation led by Senators Bartlett (R-OK) and Griffin (R-MI) visited Somalia in the summer of 1975. Although the delegation's stated intent was to observe Soviet activities in Berbera, the Somali President had really hoped to use the visit to highlight the effects of a prolonged drought and a mounting refugee crisis in an appeal for American aid. Ultimately, though, he acquiesced and permitted the Senators to visit Berbera. To their alarm, Bartlett and Griffin observed "lots of Soviets around." Reporting to President Ford following their visit, they noted that "[t]hey were really all over the place."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, their impression was that the Somali people disliked the Soviets and were actually afraid of them. This helped the Somali President succeed in convincing the Americans that he was sincerely interested in forging ties and giving the United States equal treatment to the Soviets, going so far as to offer military facilities.<sup>55</sup> While some members of the administration took this seriously (the Secretary of the Navy in particular advocated acceptance), their main hope was that the appearance of strong Soviet presence in the region would help win Democrats' votes for approval of expanding the base in Diego Garcia.

The Somali Ambassador had requested a meeting with President Ford on 30 June 1975. Though the State Department was intrigued by his assertion that Somalia could only reduce its reliance upon the Soviet Union with American help, they had deliberately delayed granting the request until they received feedback from the Congressional visit to Berbera. Secretary Kissinger finally arranged a ten-minute meeting for 24 September. Ambassador Addou brought a personal letter from Siad Barre for the President,

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<sup>54</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, President Ford with Senators Bartlett and Griffin. 7 July 1975." Box 13, NSA MemCons. GRFL.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

requesting closer ties, and President Ford used the opportunity to inform the Ambassador that the United States was resuming aid to Somalia by contributing \$4 million for a World Bank project.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Ford began the process of establishing ties with socialist Somalia that would prove to be a pitfall for the Carter Administration two years later.

The State Department continued to develop these ties from its embassy in Mogadishu. American Ambassador John Loughran met with Siad Barre on a number of occasions over the next year. The topics invariably addressed the different regions of Africa. Somalia had recognized the Soviet-backed MPLA in Angola, but Siad Barre insisted that he did not support Soviet, Cuban or South African presence in the embattled country. The Somali President also expressed concern for the decolonisation process in French-controlled Djibouti, fearing that the situation could lead to an Angolan situation in the Horn. The dictator disliked American characterization of him as a Soviet stooge. Mostly, the American Ambassador felt that he was humouring the dictator, letting him rant and “get most of those burdens off his chest.”<sup>57</sup>

Coming to the assistance of Somalia proved to be too hazardous to immediately make a difference. The American plan to rely upon friendly Arab nations to supply their fellow Muslims in the Horn yielded only small results. The morning that Ambassador Addou met with President Ford in September 1975, the State Department received a telegram that the Saudi Arabian government was terminating all economic assistance to Somalia.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, the following spring, Saudi Arabia came back around but only

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<sup>56</sup> “Meeting with Dr. Abdullahi Addou, Somali Ambassador to the United States, 24 Sept. 1975.” Folder: Somalia (3), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>57</sup> “Telegram from American Embassy in Mogadishu to the Secretary of State, 27 Jan. 1976.” Folder: Somalia (3), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>58</sup> “Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from Hal Horan on President’s meeting with Ambassador Addou, 24 Sept. 1975.” Folder: Somalia (3), Box 5, NSA PCF. GRFL.

offered \$15 million compared to the \$180 million worth of equipment Somalia received from the Soviet Union. Further, the United States had to balance the fact that it was supporting Ethiopia, Somalia's enemy. The ultimate failure to come to an agreement with Somalia during the Ford years weighed on Kissinger who called the handling of the situation in his own department a "disgrace."<sup>59</sup>

Just before the end of Ford's term in office, Ambassador Loughran sent a telegram back to Washington with an attempt to analyse the future of American relations with Somalia. In fascinating language, he acknowledged that such a task was difficult "given the subtle, even elusive, nature of the Somali "character."<sup>60</sup> Because of this, he warned that the United States should remain wary of the reassurances of its Arab allies.

[T]here are Arab diplomats in Mogadiscio who believe that it will only take a little more oil money to translate the Somalis' private assurances of Islamic and Arab solidarity into a more orthodox Arab-oriented foreign policy, while staring in the face of the GSDR's (Greater Somalia Democratic Republic) massive commitment to the USSR.<sup>61</sup>

However, the Ford administration's time was coming to an end and it would be up to its successor to heed the warning.

Opening a relationship with Somalia, both to please its Arab allies and to potentially poach yet another Soviet client, proved a strong temptation to the United States. Yet caution ruled the approach of the State Department. As long as Washington felt the Ethiopian situation was still in flux, Somalia was not that important to American geo-strategic concerns. However, the biggest impediment to the Somali desire for US

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<sup>59</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation. President Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft. 10 May 1976." Box 19, NSA MemCons. GRFL .

<sup>60</sup> "Airgram A-86 From the Embassy in Somalia to the Department of State, November 25, 1976" Document 168, Vol. E-6, FRUS.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

aid, was Siad Barre himself. Though Kissinger regretted the American failure to displace the Soviet Union in Mogadishu, the officials who dealt with the Somali leader clearly did not trust him enough to risk a diplomatic gamble with a country that still appeared firmly entrenched in the socialist camp.

### **Trouble in Eritrea**

Following the execution of Prime Minister Aman, the Eritrean insurgency started up again in earnest, and those left in control of the Derg were determined to use any means possible to destroy it. The United States had military and civilian personnel in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, though the use of Kagnev Communications Station had been reduced to a few residual functions due to budgetary and technical needs. The Nixon administration had ordered its eventual closure while Haile Selassie was still emperor and relations between the two countries were still good.<sup>62</sup> Washington received conflicting reports from its consulate in Asmara and its embassy in Addis Ababa on how it should respond to the growing upheaval. General Robert Perry, the Acting Consul in Eritrea, recommended that the United States act as mediator for the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict and withhold aid to Ethiopia in the meantime.<sup>63</sup> However, the Ethiopian embassy believed that US presence was beneficial enough to Eritrea that the leadership of the EPLF and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) would steer clear of American targets. So, Chargé d’Affaires Wyman recommended that the United States stay out of the conflict

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<sup>62</sup> “National Security Decision Memorandum 231. 14 Aug. 1973.” *Carter-Brezhnev Project*. National Security Archive (hereafter NSA). Washington, D.C.

<sup>63</sup> “Telegram 27 From the Consulate in Asmara to the Department of State, January 10, 1975.” Document 127, Volume E-6, FRUS.

and continue Ethiopian aid.<sup>64</sup> He was terribly wrong on this appraisal of the safety of American interests in Asmara.

Ultimately, US assessments of the situation on the ground were tragically flawed. Heavy fighting broke out in Eritrea on 31 January 1975 threatening Kagnew. Washington sent a destroyer to the Red Sea in February, though its orders were to remain out of sight from land.<sup>65</sup> For their protection, all non-essential personnel at Kagnew were ordered to withdraw to Addis Ababa.<sup>66</sup> Still, the United States was determined to keep some presence in Asmara so that Ethiopia did not feel completely abandoned. In return, the Americans asked the Ethiopians to help ensure the security of their military facilities. Both Italy and the United Kingdom expressed alarm on the deteriorating situation in Eritrea. The British Ambassador in Addis Ababa proposed meeting to discuss the possibility of sending in peace-keeping forces to the region but Kissinger wasn't interested. "News of any such consultations would be likely to leak out," he asserted, "thereby causing more consternation on the part of the PMG which has already shown itself so sensitive to press speculations."<sup>67</sup> The United States continued to tiptoe around the PMG lest they offend, but such courtesy failed to produce any dividends.

The State Department also opted out of involving itself directly in negotiations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, preferring to leave that to regional players such as Sudan, though even then, they refused to acknowledge it publicly. The United States was in a difficult diplomatic spot and its response was to essentially do nothing. Ethiopia did not

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<sup>64</sup> "Telegram from the American Embassy in Addis Ababa to the Secretary of State. 14 Jan 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept Telegrams To SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>65</sup> "Telegram from the Secretary of State to the American Consulate in Asmara. 2 Feb 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept Telegrams to SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>66</sup> "Telegram from the Secretary of State to American Embassy in Addis Ababa. 6 Feb 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept Telegrams to SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>67</sup> "Telegram from SECSTATE to American Embassy in Addis Ababa. 25 Feb. 1975" Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept Telegrams From SECSTATE-NODIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

want to appear to be negotiating with Eritrea and the Derg was annoyed with Nimeiri for publicizing the negotiations. Moreover, the State Department tried to avoid public discussion of military aid to Ethiopia. They worried that publicising the figures would embarrass Addis Ababa; indeed, what Washington actually provided was far less than had been requested. Even the relatively small figure would seem very large to the Eritreans, so there was nothing to gain there either.<sup>68</sup> Instead the United States blandly continued to stress their continued support for territorial integrity in order to stay in the good graces of the OAU.<sup>69</sup>

On 14 July 1975, Washington's situation became complicated further. Armed gunmen abducted two Americans and four Ethiopians from Kagnev Communications Station. The Americans, Steve Campbell and Jim Harrel, worked for Collins International Service Company (CISCO), a government contractor. The administration was unsure how to react at first. It took a month to simply find out who was holding them, but by mid-August, intelligence sources discovered that the two men were being held by the EPLF. Although the State Department was initially prepared to allow the PMG to handle the situation, it's leadership proved less than cooperative. Frustratingly for Foggy Bottom, the Ethiopians refused to broadcast pleas made by the families of the two Americans for their safe return. The Derg believed that the two men were sympathetic to the insurgents cause.<sup>70</sup> Still, eager to avoid offence, American officials insisted that the PMG deal with the situation as the host country.

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<sup>68</sup> "Telegram from American Embassy in Addis Ababa to SECSTATE 16 Mar 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept. Telegrams To SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>69</sup> Integrity of African state borders was a central tenet of the OAU's founding charter in 1963.

<sup>70</sup> "Telegram from SECSTATE to American Embassy in Addis Ababa. 30 July 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept. Telegrams From SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

Nearly two months later, On 12 September 1975, the ELF raided the US facility at Asmara, kidnapping a further eight people, including two more Americans. In return for their release, the insurgents issued four demands.

1. The United States must close Kagnew and other Eritrean bases.
2. The United States should pay compensation for the destruction of Eritrean areas bombed with American weapons.
3. The United States should pressure Ethiopia to release Eritrean freedom fighters from jails in Addis Ababa.
4. The United States should cease sending military aid to Ethiopia for use against Eritrea.<sup>71</sup>

The first and last of these stipulations were already under review so Washington had to figure out a way to carry out its policy without seeming to capitulate to the kidnappers' demands. Unwilling to open negotiations with the insurgents, the State Department was content to play for time and the American embassy kept Addis Ababa completely informed of any contact it had with the Eritreans.<sup>72</sup> The kidnappings, though, impressed upon the Ford administration the vulnerability of its military installations in Ethiopia. With Kagnew scheduled for eventual closure anyway, the administration commissioned a cost/benefit analysis to consider the effects of closing the operation immediately. There were three main considerations: the feasibility of undertaking the station's duties elsewhere, the effect departure or continued presence would have on US-Ethiopian relations, and the likelihood of continued fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>73</sup> The answer to the first question was easy, given that most of the communications' operations that had once been Kagnew's domain had already been moved to Diego Garcia. The

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<sup>71</sup> "Press Guidance, 15 Sept. 1975." Box 4, NSA NSC Press and Congressional Liaison Staff. GRFL.

<sup>72</sup> "Telegram from SECSTATE to American Embassy in Addis Ababa. 18 Sept. 1975." Folder: Ethiopia-State Dept. Telegrams from SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

<sup>73</sup> National Security Study Memorandum on the Future of Kagnew Station. 23 Oct. 1975." Folder: NSSM 233, Box 2, NSA National Security Study Memoranda and Decision Memoranda, 1974-1977. GRFL.

second issue was more complicated. The United States ultimately underestimated the message that withdrawing from the base would send, at least toward Ethiopian moderates who hoped to maintain the country's American ties.<sup>74</sup> As for the last point, the American government concluded that the Eritrean insurgency would not abate any time soon and that Ethiopia was determined to fight it at all costs. It was clear that after a suitable amount of time so as to avoid the appearance of giving in to the kidnappers' demands, the United States would eventually withdraw permanently from Kagneu.

The hostage situation also affected American thinking on the subject of arms for Ethiopia. Citing moral concerns, given the brutal tactics of the Ethiopian military, many in the US government, particularly in Congress, were already wary of sending military aid to be used against the Eritrean insurgents. Now that those insurgents held four American hostages whose release depended on the cessation of US arms shipments to Ethiopia, there was a renewed Congressional call to stop the pipeline.<sup>75</sup> However, the State Department weighed this against the further strain a withdrawal would cause in relations with Ethiopia and the risk of being seen as giving in to the kidnappers' demands. Confidentially notifying Congress, the administration decided to go ahead with the planned sale of 16 F-5E fighters and supporting aircraft. The State Department and National Security Council hoped this would remain secret, but were well aware that opposition in Congress made a leak to the press more likely.<sup>76</sup> One thing seemed certain, the longer the sale remained out of the public eye, the less political fallout for the

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<sup>74</sup> See chapter 4 for further discussion.

<sup>75</sup> The American consulate in Asmara was a voice of reason here. See the excellent treatment of this by Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It For You*, p 268-281.

<sup>76</sup> "Memorandum for Clinton Granger to Brent Scowcroft 22 Oct. 1975." Folder: Ethiopia, Box 2, NSA PCF. GRFL.

administration and, ultimately, the more manoeuvrability it would have in dealing with changing events in the Horn.

The press did weigh in on the issue of Eritrea. The *Washington Post* ran a series of articles from the perspective of the insurgents beginning in the spring of 1976. The author, Dan Connell, was at once undeniably impressed with the Eritrean rebels and chagrined with the American inability to break with the oppressive Ethiopian military regime. From Asmara, he wrote, "People repeatedly stopped us, praising the Americans who had lived here. But these warm memories seemed to be severely strained by current associations with the brutal repression by the Ethiopian military forces."<sup>77</sup> Connell also included many accounts of Ethiopian peasant POWs who ultimately came to sympathise with their captors, claiming to have known little of the motivations for the conflict before they were conscripted by the Ethiopian army and sent to fight. While Addis Ababa claimed its soldiers were "volunteers," the captives shared stories of being forced or duped into fighting the Eritreans with no training and often with no weapon.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, the *Washington Post* advertised the debate within the US government on whether to specifically warn Ethiopia away from an outright offensive against Eritrea, a battle that Washington privately did not believe Ethiopia could win.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the article did not consider whether the Americans still retained enough influence for a potential warning to make a difference.

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<sup>77</sup> Connell, Dan. "Death, Hunger and Fear in Asmara." *The Washington Post*, 14 May 1976. Found in *Taking on the Superpowers*.

<sup>78</sup> Connell, Dan. "Peasants Learn Truth about Eritrea: Ethiopian Captives tell of Regime's Deceit, Literacy Training by Rebel Captors." *The Washington Post*, 1 Aug. 1976. From *Taking on the Superpowers*.

<sup>79</sup> "U.S. weighs urging Ethiopia against War." *The Washington Post*, 14 May, 1976. Found in Box 1, NSA NSC Press and Congressional Liaison Staff 1973-1976. GRFL.

There were those on both the left and the right of American politics who criticized the failure of successive American governments to find sympathy for the Eritrean insurgents.<sup>80</sup> The reasons for this are several. First, the issue was not given as much thought as it should have received. The inviolability of African state borders was completely accepted by the US government, in part because it was a basic tenet of the OAU. Second, there were so many competing interests in Eritrea for much of the early part of the conflict, that even if the United States had wanted to side against Ethiopia, they would have had to choose from a number of factions. Indeed, Qadaffi's Libya, Somalia, the Marxist regime in South Yemen, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan all supported various entities within Eritrea. Over time, Eritrean unity was largely forged in response to the cruelties of the PMG. That these cruelties were perpetuated with American weapons was not conducive to establishing positive relations with Eritrea.

The Ethiopians' cruel repression of the Eritrean insurgency put the United States in a difficult position. Though the Ford Administration felt it had successfully resisted Ethiopian demands for more and more arms, Eritreans could only see that the Ethiopian army was using American planes and weapons to brutalise Eritrea. This served to make many members of Congress uncomfortable and strengthened calls to stop the arms pipeline to Ethiopia. Washington had also misjudged the security situation in Asmara and the publicity surrounding the American hostages in Eritrea heightened the urgency to take a stand. However, Cold War considerations always came first. As Addis Ababa threatened to reach out to Moscow for its military needs, the United States once again cast aside its moral qualms and continued to provide arms. Due to domestic needs, the

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<sup>80</sup> See the previous reference for Dan Connell, as well as Robert Kaplan, *Surrender or Starve: Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

Ford administration attempted to underplay the continuation of the pipeline, but this too aided the harsh regime in Ethiopia which had no desire to advertise its reliance on the despised United States. Mengistu was rapidly learning how to manipulate a superpower.

### **Conclusion: Ford's legacy in East Africa**

While the Ford administration, like its predecessors, would have preferred to largely ignore the fate of the Horn of Africa, the Ethiopian Revolution and the Soviets' use of a base in Somalia brought the region onto their radar screen. Since the end of World War II, the United States had relied upon its ally Haile Selassie to keep the region quiet, but had suddenly to contend with unpredictable revolutionaries. For much of President Ford's term in office, it was not even clear who was going to win the power struggle in Ethiopia, making the formation of any kind of policy extremely difficult. This confusion led the US government to continually evaluate the situation, but ultimately to carry on as before. Since it was difficult to create a new policy, the old one was never scrapped. Policy-makers could only modify the agreements that were already in place and so, despite incredible anti-American sentiment and horrible human rights violations, the United States continued to supply military aid to Ethiopia. As the American press and Congress became uncomfortable with this, the Administration chose to compromise by reducing aid.

The opportunity to open relations with Somalia during this period also placed the Horn on the US government's agenda. Washington did not want to lose its influence in Ethiopia, but it couldn't resist the chance to undermine Soviet influence in Somalia. Siad Barre's clever invitation to a Congressional delegation raised hopes in Washington that

Somalia would prefer American aid to Soviet assistance. Though this American aid was not immediately dispatched, the administration had laid the groundwork for a future alliance with Mogadishu.

The insurgency in Eritrea provided the toughest obstacle to the Ford administration's Horn policy. Led by the State Department, the Americans increasingly found the Derg's treatment of Eritrea the most potent reason to sever the arms pipeline to Ethiopia. As Addis Ababa continually appealed to Washington for defensive arms, the administration could see that the Ethiopian military used those same American weapons to brutally suppress internal opposition. Eritrean insurgent groups had begun to make influential friends in the United States and the rebels' kidnapping of Americans in Asmara only served to better advertise Eritrea's plight. Ford and his advisors were willing to overlook anti-American sentiment, but it found it needed to respond somehow to the Derg's harsh repression of its own people. However, Ethiopia's threat to seek Soviet arms instead led the administration to find a half-measure. This satisfied no one. President Ford hoped to send the message that the United States did not condone the Ethiopian tactics to suppress the Eritrean insurgency. Unfortunately, to Eritrea and the world, the continuation of aid, albeit reduced, looked like support. To Ethiopia, it appeared that the United States was slowly withdrawing from its commitment to an old ally in a time of its greatest need, giving the country no choice but to seek assistance elsewhere.

The 1970s saw the Cold War shift from Europe to the Third World and erupt with new fury in Africa. The newly decolonised continent appeared to hold several new nations who had not yet decided on which side of the East-West divide they might fall.

Washington and Moscow found it too irresistible to refuse picking up new adherents to their respective ideologies. Kissinger and Ford, in moments of clarity, did recognize that the United States had the power to make a difference in Africa with economic support to moderate leaders, but competition with the Soviets forced them into some short-term solutions rather than building long-term goals. With moderate leaders hard to find in the Horn of Africa, the administration hoped to set an example by building up friendly governments. In a place like Zaire, where President Mobutu provided assistance to CIA involvement in Angola, Kissinger had high hopes.

We are giving aid anyway. But right now we are using band-aids. We need to analyse what it takes to get Zaire on its feet. If we could make a couple of countries showcases, we would be doing great. It won't take all that much-- \$100 million for Zaire. If we put in what we are doing in Egypt...<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, Ford's tenure in office was so short that he barely had a chance to initiate some of these programs. Regardless, the American knack for picking "moderate" leaders, such as the aforementioned Mobutu, who were rather corrupt and brutal dictators, was certain to undermine any attempts at setting positive examples to the rest of the continent.

In the autumn of 1976, as Americans were voting for President, the CIA, in conjunction with other American intelligence agencies, prepared an estimation of the Soviet military policy in the Third World. Among the key judgments was the notion that the Soviets viewed the Third World as the best site for its competition with both China and the West. While the Middle East would remain the focal point, sub-Saharan Africa would provide the greatest opportunities for the USSR. "The Soviets will doubtless be alert to opportunities to exploit troubles there even though they will have little ability to

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<sup>81</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation. President Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft. 10 May 1976." Box 19, NSA MemCon. GRFL.

control or even predict developments.”<sup>82</sup> Their analysis continued with the assertion that “while the Soviets continue to support the spread of communism, the ideology of potential clients has not generally hampered the development of a military relationship.”<sup>83</sup> The authors also contended that “despite major setbacks in Indonesia, Egypt, and the Sudan, the Soviets are convinced that their efforts in the Third World have significantly increased Moscow’s prestige and influence in world affairs and have contributed to Soviet national security.”<sup>84</sup> The Agency then predicted that the Soviet Union would be increasingly bold in its support of national liberation movements, while pragmatically continuing to search for strategic global positions. In the Horn, the authors guessed that “given the assets they have in Somalia, the Soviets have less pressing requirements for additional facilities in the Indian Ocean but will continue looking.”<sup>85</sup> Finally, the assessment noted that though the Soviet Union had never been involved in large-scale military operations in a Third World country, it certainly had the capability to intervene rapidly on the ground.

There was general agreement in the intelligence community on this assessment of Soviet behaviour and Jimmy Carter inherited these ideas. As the United States understood it, the Soviets would continue to extend its influence abroad. This pre-conceived notion, however, fuelled American concerns that the Soviets were bent on world domination each time it happened. This would feed the need of Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to take a stand against the Soviet Union in

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<sup>82</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) Soviet Military Policy in the Third World, 10 Nov. 1976.” *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Ethiopia to halt what he saw as a pattern of fomenting leftist revolution in chaotic regions.

In light of the aforementioned attitudes, the passivity of the US government in dealing with Ethiopia during this period is astounding. At this point, it is certainly not the case of a superpower manipulating a weaker country, but quite the reverse. Washington got little but abuse in return for its arms investments, yet it made very little effort to either change or withdraw from the situation. Ethiopians who had little or no power convinced Washington that with a little patience, the conditions would improve. Unfortunately for American interests, they never gained any momentum and the Ford administration missed what turned out to be a final chance to use the armament pipeline to push Addis Ababa toward better relations.

Détente was suffering badly by the time President Ford left office. The Soviet and Cuban involvement in Angola in 1974 and 1975 exposed the problem that the United States and Soviet Union had differing perceptions as to what was permitted under the basic principles of détente.<sup>86</sup> Domestically, the left attacked Ford and Kissinger for not developing more far-reaching agreements with Brezhnev and Gromyko and the right attacked them for going too far. Anti-SALT senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) had taken up the cause of human rights to put pressure on the Soviet Union, with the Jackson-Vanik Amendment denying most-favoured-nation (MNF) trade status to the Soviet Union as long as Moscow refused to allow Jewish emigration. Furthermore,

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<sup>86</sup> A Harris and Associates poll asked Americans the question, “do you think it is possible for the United States and Russia to reach long-term agreements to help keep the peace or do you think this is not possible?” In December 1975 44.9% of respondents said they can reach agreements, 38.8% said this is not possible and 16.3% were not sure. These responses indicated the lowest “can reach agreements” and highest “not possible” since the start of détente. This poll is found in Tom W. Smith. “The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer 1983), p. 285.

human rights activists on the left and the right began to acknowledge and meet leading Soviet dissidents. All of this served to undermine détente in the United States and cause the Soviet Union to question American sincerity. Within the administration, despite his better personal relations with Donald Rumsfeld than James Schlesinger, the policy continued to suffer when Ford replaced one anti-détente Secretary of Defence with another. The strong challenge in the Republican primaries from the neo-conservative movement in the form of Ronald Reagan persuaded Ford to cease to use the term “détente” as it had become so unpopular in Republican circles. From the American point of view, in order to salvage what was left of its relations with the USSR, the US government needed to make clear to the Soviet Union that intervention in Angola, Africa and the Third World generally was not acceptable if it wanted to maintain these new and positive ties with the United States. Its failure to do so ensured that détente would fail because neither the American public, nor the government could support it.

## Chapter II “Why just ‘wait and see’?”

President Jimmy Carter took office in 1977 promising a new sense of idealism in American foreign policy. The Vietnam humiliation and the domestic scandals of the Nixon administration stirred in the American people a renewed taste for morality in the way the United States conducted itself. The voters had chosen an obscure born-again-Christian southern Governor with few Washington ties to lead them out of their national ignominy. Carter promised the American people that he wouldn't lie to them. In his inaugural address, he articulated his new vision for the country:

The world itself is now dominated by a new spirit. Peoples more numerous and more politically aware are craving and now demanding their place in the sun—not just for the benefit of their own physical condition, but for basic human rights. The passion for freedom is on the rise. Tapping this new spirit, there can be no nobler nor more ambitious task for America to undertake on this day of a new beginning than to help shape a just and peaceful world that is truly humane.<sup>1</sup>

Carter had campaigned on a foreign policy platform emphasizing disarmament and human rights and had distanced himself from the cold *Realpolitik* of the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger era. Now in office, he aimed to conclude a new SALT agreement with the Soviet Union, give new attention to Latin America and break the habit of American policy-makers of viewing all Third World issues through the prism of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> For the first of these goals, the administration approached the Soviet Union with a

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, Jimmy. “Inaugural Address.” 20 January 1977. *Public Papers of the Presidents*. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> See Cyrus Vance's memoirs, *Hard Choices* pp. 32-33, Zbigniew Brzezinski's memoirs, *Power and Principle*, pp. 50-51, as well as Raymond Garthoff's *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 625. Carter had a particular interest in Latin America as he and the First Lady spoke Spanish and had travelled widely in the region. However, he was also distinctly aware of the detrimental policies toward the region of his immediate predecessors.

proposal for aggressive arms cuts to its counterpart in Moscow. For its commitment to the second, it gave immediate emphasis on the Panama Canal Treaties, and it reached out to Cuba with an aim to normalizing relations. As for the third goal, this was tested by rapid developments in the Horn of Africa. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance succinctly summed up the importance of the administration's handling of this crisis.

As had been true during the Nixon and Ford Administrations, our ability and determination to pursue a balanced policy toward the Soviet Union was most severely tested in the Third World. We had reached a consensus within the administration on NATO and SALT, but Soviet activities in Africa caused sharp differences among us. What we did in Africa in the early months of 1977 would have a major effect on Third World perceptions of our policy toward the developing nations, and would set the tone for the remainder of the administration.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will address the Carter administration's response to events in the Horn of Africa from Carter's inauguration on 20 Jan 1977 to 13 July 1977 when the administration received reports that Somalia had launched a large-scale invasion of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. During this period, the mechanisms of decision-making within the administration were established and the fissures between the world views espoused by Vance and Brzezinski became apparent. Finally, though they had desired to avoid such a pitfall, Carter's advisors started to treat the problems in the Horn of Africa as Cold War problems. These first six months set the stage for American thinking on the crisis in the Horn, the way the administration interpreted events on the ground, and the effect of these interpretations on Carter's approach to détente. Considerations such as the role of American public opinion, the impact of the personalities involved, and the influence of ideology just started to emerge.

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<sup>3</sup> Vance, Cyrus. *Hard Choices*, p. 70.

Though the effect of the crisis in demonstrating that détente had failed would not become clear until later, the Carter administration's manoeuvres during this period created a clear path in that direction.

Like his Cold War predecessors and successors, the new president held strong convictions about the innate goodness of the American system and desired that his foreign policy reflect that. Carter had the same end in mind as that of the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford era (an American victory in the Cold War) but differed in the means.<sup>4</sup> He believed that the United States would win the battle for the hearts and minds of the world, if the world merely understood that the American model was just morally better than the Soviet one and he wished to lead by example. Unfortunately, he was too inexperienced in foreign policy to realize that the moral and just path was more than often not clear and, despite the best of intentions, engaged in a series of missteps in his first six months.

### **The Carter Administration's Foreign Policy Goals**

For his foreign policy team, President Carter chose Cyrus Vance as his Secretary of State and Zbigniew Brzezinski as his Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Both were well established in the New York foreign policy scene and they would set the tone for the Carter administration's course of action in international affairs. Having worked together on the campaign, the two men recommended each other for their respective posts, but their ideological differences would have widespread implications for the administration's foreign policy. From the outset, the

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that any American president knew what a victory would look like or when such a thing would occur. It is merely to say that all believed that the American system was better than the Soviet one and therefore would ultimately win. This is similar to the attitude the Soviets had about their own system

two had obviously conflicting goals, although initially Carter hoped they would compliment each other.

To some extent, the two men's backgrounds foreshadowed their philosophical differences. Cyrus Vance's personal papers are filled with correspondence with a veritable 'who's who' of the New York and Washington establishments.<sup>5</sup> He was born and bred an insider, attending the Kent School in Connecticut before matriculating at Yale College and Yale Law School. His wife was a member of a Philadelphia Main Line family, a symbol of the old money establishment. After serving in the Pacific during the Second World War, he had established a successful legal career with a large New York firm and then with the Senate and the Department of Defense. He had been Secretary of the Army during the Kennedy Administration and Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Johnson years, where Vietnam had taught him first-hand the follies of military involvement in the Third World. President Lyndon Johnson and his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had recognized Vance's talent for negotiation and deployed him to such trouble spots as Panama, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Cyprus and Korea. He was a product of the Establishment and garnered great respect from those under him. However, his dogged patience and emphasis on quiet bargaining later invoked disdain from Brzezinski who unflatteringly surmised the reasons for Vance's approach.

I could not help reflecting on the extent to which Vance seemed to be the quintessential product of his own background: as a member of both the legal profession and the once-dominant WASP elite, he operated according to their values and rules, but those values and rules were of declining relevance not only in terms of domestic politics but particularly in terms of global conditions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Cyrus Vance and Grace Sloan Vance Papers*. Manuscripts and Archives. Yale University. New Haven, CT.

<sup>6</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p. 43.

Brzezinski's reflections had as much to do with his own background as with Vance's. Zbigniew Brzezinski was born in Poland in 1927, the son of a Polish diplomat. In Warsaw, he gained first-hand experience of the Soviet Union, which certainly contributed to his mistrust of Soviet promises and his inherent belief in Soviet aggressiveness. During his exit interview upon leaving the National Security Council, he recalled the events leading to Poland's defeat in 1939. Brzezinski described the capitulation of Warsaw to the German Wehrmacht as a "poignant" moment, but highlighted the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland two weeks earlier as the decisive blow. The Soviets, acting in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany, were responsible for "stabbing it [Poland] in the back and, thereby, sealing its fate. For that attack made resistance to the Nazi's impossible."<sup>7</sup> After completing undergraduate studies at McGill University in Canada, he emigrated to the United States in 1953. He received a PhD from Harvard that year and became a U.S. citizen five years later.

Brzezinski developed his reputation as an activist political scholar during his tenure at Columbia University, publishing widely on the virtue of power in foreign policy dealings. In his memoirs, he asserted, "I was a naturalized American, even though politically more intensely American than most."<sup>8</sup> He valued American honour with the fervour of a convert. He was ambitious and coveted a high-profile government appointment, but rather tellingly, he never wanted to be Secretary of State. He claimed that he had always wanted the National Security Advisor position as he believed it to be more important. This post allowed him to integrate

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<sup>7</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski. "Exit Interview, 20 February 1981, Washington, DC." Oral History Transcripts. JCPL.

<sup>8</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*. p. 20.

information from the CIA and the Departments of State and Defense, and filter it directly to the ear of the President.<sup>9</sup>

While Vance and Brzezinski would dominate the administration's foreign policymaking, and come to embody the battle for its soul, they were not the only voices represented. The new Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, was born in New York City, and received three degrees from Columbia University, including a PhD in Physics at the age of 21. His early career focused on radiation research at several California laboratories. He then served under McNamara in the Defense Department during the early 1960's and as Secretary of the Air Force from 1965-1969. During the Nixon and Ford administrations, Brown was the President of the California Institute of Technology. He supported cuts in military spending, at least at the outset, and preferred to avoid the clash of big personalities elsewhere in the National Security establishment.<sup>10</sup> As such, the main debates on the course of American foreign policy remained with the National Security Council staff and the State Department.

Admiral Stansfield Turner got the appointment as Director of the CIA after Carter withdrew his initial choice, former Kennedy Advisor Ted Sorenson. Turner had been a classmate of Carter's at the Naval Academy, though they had not known each other well. He was a Rhodes Scholar and had been commander of NATO forces in Southern Europe. In the committee meetings on the handling of the crisis in the Horn, the Admiral always participated. However, as CIA documents remain classified, his role in the administration's foreign policy remains difficult to assess.

Finally, Vice-President Walter Mondale would play a prominent role in Carter's foreign policy team. He participated in most of the relevant committee

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<sup>9</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski. "Exit Interview, 20 February 1981, Washington, DC." Oral History Transcripts. JCPL.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef\\_histories/bios/brown.htm](http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef_histories/bios/brown.htm)

meetings and met with foreign leaders and ambassadors. Brzezinski summarized Mondale's role as such, "In general, Carter rarely, if ever, thought of foreign policy in terms of domestic politics, while Mondale rarely, if ever, thought of it otherwise."<sup>11</sup> Through this lens, the Vice-President involved himself in the decision-making process on the Horn with an eye to public opinion.

Jimmy Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski had met as members of the Trilateral Commission, an organisation intended to promote better relations between the United States, Western Europe and Japan, an organisation that also counted Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown among its members. The future National Security Advisor joined the Carter campaign early, while the Georgia governor was polling less than 2% nationwide.<sup>12</sup> This early loyalty and what Brzezinski referred to as "chemistry" help explain the tight bond that the President and his National Security Advisor forged. President Carter wanted to streamline government agencies, and applied this to the National Security Council as well. He and Brzezinski worked out a structure composed of two committees. There was to be a Policy Review Committee (PRC) to deal with foreign and defence policy and international economic issues, which would be chaired by the appropriate Secretary. Secondly, there would be a Special Coordination Committee (SCC), chaired by the National Security Advisor, to deal with issues of intelligence and covert activity, arms control (particularly SALT) and crisis management. Prior to a meeting of either the PRC or the SCC, the lead department would prepare a Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) to be reviewed before the discussion.<sup>13</sup> All of the White House meetings on events in the Horn occurred under the mantle of these two committees or their subcommittees.

After the meeting, the National Security Council Staff would summarise its

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<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*. p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 59-61.

recommendations in a Presidential Directive to be submitted for Carter's signature without the other participants' review. Secretary Vance objected to this procedure and in his memoirs states that he often found discrepancies between his recollections of the meetings and subsequent conclusions.<sup>14</sup> As becomes apparent later, Brzezinski manipulated this system well to ensure that he always got the final word with the President.

Vance also was aware before hand of potential differences with the National Security Advisor and set out his own rules to protect his area of influence. The future Secretary of State, in handwritten notes from December 1976 for a talk with Brzezinski, wrote, "Zbig will not see Ambassador without my o.k.," and "no exparte (sic) views without prior discussion with me."<sup>15</sup> He also noted that the National Security Council Staff should not call the State Department desk officers for information.<sup>16</sup> Though the two men would attempt to downplay their differences, each was clearly wary of the other from the start.

According to his memoirs, Brzezinski had three major policy objectives at the start of Carter's term. First, through an emphasis on human rights, he hoped to reinvigorate the idea of American democracy as a model for the rest of the world. Second, he wanted to improve the United States' strategic position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. He believed this could happen by using the leverage of improving Sino-American relations. Third, Brzezinski hoped to regain the friendship of the Third World.<sup>17</sup> Although the first seems potentially contradictory to his concern with power politics, it reflected his pride and belief in American democracy, of which power was also a key element.

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<sup>14</sup> Vance, Cyrus. *Hard Choices* p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Vance, Cyrus. Handwritten Notes for talk with Brzezinski. Box 8/Folder 5 (1976). *Cyrus Vance and Grace Sloan Vance Papers*. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. New Haven, CT.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle* p. 3.

Jimmy Carter and Cyrus Vance had met twice before the Presidential Campaign in 1976, once in Atlanta five years earlier and once at a meeting of the Trilateral Commission. Richard Gardner, one of the Carter campaign's foreign policy advisors, approached Vance early in 1976 to ask him to join the team, but Vance was already committed to helping his old friend Sargent Shriver vie for the Democratic nomination. After Shriver dropped out of the race, Carter called Vance and asked him again. Vance met with Gardner, Anthony Lake and Richard Holbrooke, all old friends of his, as well as members of the foreign policy team, and decided to accept. Vance recalls being impressed by the meeting.

Carter was intelligent and hardworking. He had a set of values that I found attractive. His thinking reflected a principled approach to foreign affairs, which I believed essential for the reestablishment of a broad base of domestic support for a more comprehensive foreign policy.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Brzezinski, Vance did not analyse his personal relationships with the President and his colleagues, preferring to focus on commonality of ideas.

At the future President's request, Vance prepared a memorandum in October 1976 spelling out some foreign policy goals, should Carter be elected. He cited five main objectives. First the administration should remain resolute in its dealings with the Soviet Union, but continue its efforts to reduce tensions. However, while relations with the Soviets would remain important, he held that they should not dominate American foreign policy to the detriment of other issues. Second, the administration would bring a new sensitivity to issues of importance to the unindustrialized world. Third, the United States should support the idea of freedom abroad but must not unduly interfere in the internal workings of other governments. Fourth, the new administration must act deliberately and without haste and not attempt to solve all of the world's

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<sup>18</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. p. 29.

problems at once. Last, the new administration should promote unprecedented consultation with Congress and the American people in the making of foreign policy.<sup>19</sup>

The differences between the two advisors' objectives centred on relations with the Soviet Union and the role of morality in foreign policy. While Brzezinski emphasised improving the United States' strategic position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Vance sought to de-emphasise the relationship as the central pillar of American foreign policy. Where Brzezinski hoped to aggressively bolster the idea of American democracy as the positive model for the world, Vance thought that the United States should support freedom without interfering in the internal workings of nations. The differences between Vance and Brzezinski were evident from the onset, but the President hoped they would complement each other while leaving him the final say. The Horn of Africa Crisis would become the administration's first foreign policy test and the issue that brought these differences to the forefront of its decision-making. As will be seen, the contest between Vance and Brzezinski was not just over a marginal region far from the shores of the United States, but for the heart and soul of the future of American foreign policy.

### **The State of Détente**

When Carter came to office, the United States and Soviet Union were still involved in an era of negotiations, but much of it had been put on hold during the election year when the members of the Politburo did not know if they would still be dealing with Ford and Kissinger in 1977 or with a Democratic President. Ford and Kissinger had received criticism from the left and the right of the political spectrum for this policy of accommodation with the Soviets. The former argued that the United States

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<sup>19</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. Appendix I, pp. 441-442.

needed to go further in its compromising with the rest of the world and yet maintain a commitment to human rights and ideological aspirations. Right-wing conservatives (led by Ronald Reagan) insisted that the United States wield its power to force American ideals upon the world.<sup>20</sup> The word *détente* had become so unpopular among much of the American electorate that Ford stopped using term, a move that Carter criticized.<sup>21</sup> Particularly, competition in the Third World forced the Americans to question the viability of *détente*. The United States interpreted *détente* as a series of agreements meant to bind the USSR into the international system and thereby monitor its behaviour. With various incentives, such as the sharing of Western technology, Washington hoped to be able to influence Moscow's foreign policy, particularly in the Third World. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, wanted the United States to recognize that it was an equal power. With such acknowledgement, arms limitations would be mutually beneficial to both nations and would reduce military costs. This did not mean that the Soviet leadership intended to give up the revolutionary process, or that it would cease to assist fellow communists in the Third World.<sup>22</sup> Soviet and Cuban success in Angola illustrated the failure of the American approach despite this new era of cooperation.

In light of this, Brzezinski wished to redefine *détente*. He believed that the concept needed to be more *comprehensive* and *reciprocal*. This meant that “[the United States] should insist on equal treatment (retaliating in kind, if necessary) and that the Soviets could not have a free ride in some parts of the world while pursuing

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<sup>20</sup> For Kissinger's take on criticism of *détente*, see *Years of Renewal*, pp. 92-120.

<sup>21</sup> For the most comprehensive research on *détente*, see Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation*. Also, Henry Kissinger's 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of memoirs is useful for this period, *Years of Renewal*.

<sup>22</sup> For more on this assessment of Soviet interpretations, see Garthoff. *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 42-43 and Westad, “The Fall of *Détente* and the Turning Tides of History” in Westad, ed. *The Fall of Détente*. pp. 13-14.

détente where it suited them.”<sup>23</sup> Upon coming to office, the President, without a clear plan of his own for managing détente, relied upon Vance and Brzezinski for his policy on towards the Soviet Union. The National Security Advisor doubted that Carter initially understood the significance of the terms “comprehensive” and “reciprocal.”<sup>24</sup> As another sign of the differences between the two foreign policy bodies, the NSC and the State Department vigorously debated the use of these terms. Brzezinski recalled that “as the months went on, Vance and his colleagues started objecting to the use of these words, and the drafting of almost every Presidential speech involved Vance crossing them out and me reinserting them.”<sup>25</sup> This belief in “reciprocity” would later be the guiding force in Brzezinski’s insistence on linking events on the Horn to other aspects of bilateral relations.

Though the President had not fully formed his own position on détente strategy, he did hope to rejuvenate the process of arms talks. SALT II was a high priority for the new administration. Indeed, Carter wanted to make bolder moves toward disarmament than his predecessors . Accordingly, Secretary Vance proposed greater reductions during his March 1977 visit to Moscow, a move soundly rejected by the Soviets. Raymond Garthoff, in his seminal work, argued that the Soviets were taken by surprise and perceived the proposal as so one sided that negotiations would have to start again from scratch.<sup>26</sup> Brzezinski with the benefit of hindsight accepted that it may not have been wise to go public with the new American proposals, which only succeeded in emphasizing the Soviet concessions requested in the process.<sup>27</sup>

Vance also said that he could not overstate the damage caused by the Soviet rejection

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<sup>23</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*. p. 147.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Garthoff. *Détente and Confrontation*. p. 626.

<sup>27</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*. p. 163-164.

of Carter's SALT proposals.<sup>28</sup> He was referring to Congress and public opinion in this case, however. Neither was prepared to admit that the administration had poorly assessed the situation and naively overreached itself.

The other miscalculation on the part of Carter and his team was the assumption that they could simultaneously induce the Soviet Union to accept large arms reductions while the United States continued to crusade against human rights violations. In November 1976, two months before his inauguration, Carter sent a supportive telegram to Soviet dissident Vladimir Slepak. Shortly after he was sworn in as President, Carter praised another Soviet dissident, Andrei Sakharov. As he was not yet linking his promotion of human rights to arms talks, the President did not realize the detrimental effect his rhetoric was having on his other dealings with the Soviets. After the unsuccessful SALT II talks in Moscow, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko insisted that Carter's human rights campaign poisoned the atmosphere and hindered negotiations.<sup>29</sup> Carter saw it differently. Even in retrospect, he did not regret the policy.

I cannot recall any instance when the human-rights issue was the *direct* cause of failure in working with the Soviets on matters of common interest. However, it did create tension between us and prevented a more harmonious resolution of some of our other differences. In truth, this remains a moot question for me. Even if our human-rights policy had been a much more serious point of contention in Soviet-American relations, I would not have been inclined to accommodate Soviet objections. We have a fundamental difference in philosophy concerning human freedoms, and it does not benefit us to cover it up.<sup>30</sup>

To the greater frustration of the Soviets, the United States did not universally apply its criticism of human rights violations. China, notably, did not receive the level of

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<sup>28</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Njolstad, Olav. "Key of Keys? SALT II and the Breakdown of Détente" found in Odd Arne Westad, ed. *The Fall of Détente*, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 149.

attention that the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries did.<sup>31</sup> Normalising relations with the People's Republic of China was a top priority for the administration, one that overshadowed any human rights violations.<sup>32</sup> Given the abominable state of Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviets felt threatened by any rapprochement between its two most feared enemies. The implications of this would further strain détente in 1978 when Brzezinski (whom the Soviets already viewed as the greatest threat to their interests in the Carter administration) visited Beijing.

This emphasis on human rights was an additional bone of contention among Carter's advisors. Secretary Vance, in his memoirs explained "My preference in dealing with human rights issues was to emphasise quiet diplomacy, saving public pressure for those occasions that called for a strong and forthright public statement."<sup>33</sup> Brzezinski, in his memoirs, expressed a different point of view.

I felt strongly that a major emphasis on human rights as a component of U.S. foreign policy would advance America's global interests by demonstrating to the emerging nations of the Third World the reality of our democratic system, in sharp contrast to the political system and practices of our adversaries. The best way to answer the Soviets' ideological challenge would be to commit the United States to a concept which most reflected America's very essence.<sup>34</sup>

This divergence emphasised Brzezinski's role as the advisor with grand ideological plans and Vance's preference to deal with issues case by case as well as their agreement on the ends, but disagreement on the means of projecting the United States' image abroad.

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<sup>31</sup> Smith, Gaddis. *Morality, Reason & Power*. p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> See Brzezinski's memoirs as well as Vance's throughout. Though they both desired normalization with China, they disagreed on whether to use this new relationship as leverage with the Soviets. Brzezinski favouring and Vance opposing.

<sup>33</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*. p. 124.

## The Carter Administration and Africa

President Carter hoped to change the way the United States dealt with the Third World. Given Kissinger's penchant for great power politics, and his belief that Third World crises could be solved if only the Soviets would show some restraint and the superpowers could work on them together, the Nixon and Ford administrations had treated regional problems as part of the Cold War. Secretary Vance was particularly critical of Kissinger's approach, especially towards Angola.

His [Kissinger's] failure to focus on the local causes of the Angolan civil war, the profound nationalism of the Angolan forces of whatever ideological coloration, his insistence on viewing the struggle (indeed, the whole complex political and racial situation in southern Africa) as a battle in the larger East-West geopolitical competition, led him to take actions and positions that reduced our ability to manoeuvre. In the end, the strongest nationalist faction was left with no alternative but dependence on Soviet, and eventually Cuban, assistance for survival.<sup>35</sup>

Carter and Vance hoped to change that. They wanted to stop turning every local conflict into one with Cold War implications. The new President truly believed that the issue of human rights was *the* international issue of the time. He wanted to end the American practice of supporting brutal dictatorships just because they were fervently anti-Soviet. Having lived through and participated in the civil rights era in the American south, Carter wished to be on the right side of the issue of majority rule in southern Africa. When he came to office, this was his number one priority for the continent.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 24. Vance does acknowledge that Kissinger tried to change this approach in Ford's final year, but it was too late to change the administration's reputation.

<sup>36</sup> Actually, the American people were suddenly interested in Africa as well. Many African-Americans saw the cause of majority rule as an extension of the civil rights movement, but the continent also began to capture the imagination of Americans at large. Two days after Carter's inauguration, the phenomenally successful mini-series *Roots*, one of the most-watched television programs in American history, began its run on television. The series traced the roots of an African-American family back through slavery to Africa.

President Carter invited his fellow Georgian and civil rights activist, Andrew Young, to be the first African-American Ambassador to the United Nations. This proved to be an internationally popular choice, though he was controversial in the United States from the start. He was an early advocate of an American boycott of business with South Africa's Apartheid regime, and he represented the United States in the negotiations to end the white rule of Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia. Young's appointment was meant to signal a change in the way the United States approached the continent. Indeed, Vance, in his memoirs, spelled out the administration's policy toward southern Africa.

In no other aspect of foreign policy did our administration differ so fundamentally from that of our predecessors. President Carter and his principal advisors agreed even before he took office that American participation in resolving the conflicts in Rhodesia and Namibia and in seeking an end apartheid in South Africa was vital.<sup>37</sup>

He went on to explain why the new approach was right and necessary.

We were committed to majority rule, self-determination, and racial equality as a matter of fairness and basic human rights. If the United States did not support social and political justice in Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa itself, Africans would correctly dismiss our human rights policy as mere cold war propaganda, employed at the expense of the peoples of Africa.<sup>38</sup>

Though these goals may sound lofty and rather earnest, they were very sincere and the administration ultimately achieved some success in its policies dealing with Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa. Carter had to deal with domestic accusations of siding with black communists against pro-Western white regimes, but he remained

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 257.

relatively consistent in his approach despite the very real fear that the Soviets would move onto southern Africa after their successes in Angola and Ethiopia.

Unfortunately for the administration's overall Africa policy, the situation in the Horn did not provide such a clear separation of good guys and bad guys. It did, however, represent a region very much in need of development, though the leaders of Ethiopia and Somalia seemed more interested in military assistance than economic aid. Secondly, unlike southern Africa, the Soviets did actually intervene massively in the region, making it much more difficult for the administration to ignore the Cold War implications of the Horn. Despite a genuine interest in changing the way the United States approached the continent, the American response to the crisis in the Ogaden effectively represented a return to the old Cold War politics of Carter's predecessors.

### **The Situation on the Horn**

The Carter administration inherited an ambiguous relationship with Ethiopia. Following the ousting of Haile Selassie, the Derg had leaned ever closer to a Marxist ideology. Like intellectuals elsewhere in the developing world, the Ethiopian elite was drawn to the communist model of rapid development. As well, the United States had a long association with the *ancien regime* of the former Emperor while the Soviet Union as an unknown entity had made fewer enemies. Ethiopia had signed its first arms deal with the Soviet Union in December 1976. Though anti-American rhetoric was prevalent in Addis Ababa, the United States had maintained its ties to this traditional ally. While Ford had been persuaded to distance Washington from the Derg by reducing arms shipments to Ethiopia, the junta's human rights record made it increasingly difficult for the Americans to steer a middle course. A human rights

report compiled in 1976 but released soon after Carter became President further strained relations by singling out the Derg for massive violations. The United States then announced in February 1977 that it was reducing aid to Ethiopia because of the report.

Ethiopia had remained in relative isolation after the revolution, doing little to change its foreign policy from that of the Imperial regime. Slowly, however, the Derg began to reach out to the socialist world. Though the People's Republic of China did not make grand overtures to the world's newest communist regime, Beijing assisted with several road-building projects (as elsewhere in Africa) and sent medical personnel to the poverty stricken country. In late 1976 and early 1977, Ethiopia signed trade and arms agreements with East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. The Soviet Union and several Eastern European states created scholarships for Ethiopians to attend their universities, taking over the role previously dominated by the United States and Western European countries.<sup>39</sup>

Somalia was still firmly in the communist camp as the Soviets continued to arm its dictator. President Siad Barre, however, had regional ambitions of uniting the Somali people in East Africa who lived in northeastern Kenya, the French territory of the Afars and Issas (present day Djibouti), and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. He saw the chaos following the Ethiopian Revolution as an opportunity to ensure that any potential break-up of the Ethiopian State would leave the Ogaden in Somali hands. Shortly after Carter's inauguration, events seemed to favour the Somali dictator's ambitions. On 3 February, Colonel Haile Mariam Mengistu's henchman, Colonel Daniel Asfaw, opened fire on the other members of the Derg in a shootout at army headquarters in Addis Ababa, killing the seven leaders, including Head of State Teferi

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<sup>39</sup> Colin Legum and Bill Lee produced a good contemporary report on the Horn of Africa that detailed the state of Ethiopian foreign policy in 1976-77. *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. (London: Rex Collings Ltd., 1977) pp. 66-71.

Bante, who could have threatened Mengistu's power. Mengistu was now the sole ruler of Ethiopia though he was quickly decimating the upper caste of Ethiopian society.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to Somalia, Ethiopia had strained relationships with most of its other neighbours. Sudanese support for the Eritrean rebels and Ethiopian use of Sudanese territory to track the insurgents exacerbated an already hostile relationship and Sudanese President Jafaar Nimiery would become one of Mengistu's harshest critics. Most African leaders preferred to stay out of the fray given their personal dislike of Mengistu. Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta kept relatively cordial relations with Mengistu at this juncture mainly out of a shared distrust of Siad Barre and his designs on both Ethiopian and Kenyan territory.

Two independence movements on the Horn would also shape events. First, Djibouti, still a French territory, was due to be granted independence. While the fallout from this proved to be marginal, in early 1977 no one could predict whether the new government would be stable. There was an additional fear that Somalia would attempt to take over when the French left, but the Djibouti concerns never really materialised. On the other hand, the repercussions of Eritrea's fight for independence continued to play a vital role in the events of the next couple of years. There had been an armed insurgency in Eritrea (still part of Ethiopia at this time) since 1961, but several parties formed in the early 70s attempted to unify the rebellion which had gained momentum after a violent crackdown by the Derg. The Marxist Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Muslim Eritrean

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<sup>40</sup> See Zewde, Bahru. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*; I.M. Lewis. *A Modern History of the Somali Revised Edition*. (Oxford: James Curry Ltd., 2002); and Paul B. Henze. *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*.

Liberation Front Revolutionary Command (ELF) led the insurgency that would require immense resources for Ethiopia to combat.<sup>41</sup>

Also influencing American diplomatic efforts in the region, Ethiopia and Somalia's neighbours took sides in the conflict. The Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia supported their fellow Muslims in Somalia. The leaders of these states encouraged Somalia to sever ties with the Soviet Union, all fearing that the infiltration of Soviet socialist ideas could undermine their own rule. Saudi Arabia would later offer Somalia £230 million in military aid, with the understanding that Siad Barre cut his links with the USSR.<sup>42</sup> Israel was the one American ally in the Middle East to side with Ethiopia, continuing to service Ethiopia's American-made equipment as well as supply arms during the war with Somalia.<sup>43</sup> Fearing pan-Islamic sentiment, Israel had formed an alliance in the 1950s with Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, and saw no reason to alienate one of its only regional allies, even though the United States objected.<sup>44</sup>

The strategic location of the Horn, at the crossroads of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, gave the region an importance that was not warranted by its lack of resources, and its lack of economic, cultural and military power. The divergent interests in the region by enemies and allies alike muddled the situation for the makers of American foreign policy. The region was a battlefield of the Cold War, an

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<sup>41</sup> For more on Eritrea, see Roy Pateman. *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning, Revised Edition*. (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1990) and David Pool. *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. (Oxford: James Currey Ltd., 2001). There is little historical literature on Djibouti during the independence period, but see for a brief assessment, Robert Tholomier, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *Djibouti: Pawn of the Horn of Africa*. (London: Scarecrow Press, 1981).

<sup>42</sup> Lewis. *A Modern History of the Somali*. p. 234.

<sup>43</sup> Pateman. *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning*, p. 102 from Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Personal Communication* (1987).

<sup>44</sup> For details on Israel's traditional alliance with Ethiopia, see Avi Shlaim. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. (London: The Penguin Group Ltd., 2000) pp. 192-199. Note that at this point, Israel had been in an official state of war with all of its neighbours since October 1973 and had an interest in maintaining relations with any ally in the region. Still, Israel's influence was marginal until the American press and public opinion began to take note of the situation in late 1977.

additional source of tension in the Middle East, and a test case for newly independent Africa. In addition to the pressures from its Middle Eastern allies and its sincere attempts to carve a more altruistic policy toward sub-Saharan Africa, the United States had to consider the concerns of its European allies in their former colonies. France, Italy and Britain all maintained economic and cultural interests with various countries on the Horn. They too worried about increasing Soviet influence in their former dependencies. However, as was the case throughout the Cold War, they all looked to the United States to take the lead. Thus, when the region threatened to explode in 1977, the whole world expected Washington to react.

### **Switching Allegiances**

Shortly after Carter's inauguration and Mengistu's assumption of sole leadership of Ethiopia, Somalia began reaching out to the United States. Though Siad Barre had declared Somalia a socialist state and had signed a treaty with the Soviet Union, he feared the growing ties between the USSR and Ethiopia would undermine his designs on the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The Soviets were pressuring Somalia to respect Ethiopia's borders. Brezhnev had sent a message to Siad Barre urging him to reconsider Somali designs on the Ogaden and to avoid exacerbating the conflict.<sup>45</sup> The Somali President's willingness to quickly shift his allegiance from the Soviet Union to the United States illustrated his ability to exploit the Cold War competition between the two superpowers in order to realise his goal of a unified pan-Somali state.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Soviet Embassy in East Germany, Report for CPSU CC summarizing Visit to Somalia on 31 January-1 February 1977 by Delegation of the GDR Socialist Unity Party (SED) CC, 18 February 1977" translated from German and found at the Cold War International History Project, *Russian and East German Documents on the Horn of Africa, 1977-78*. [www.cwihp.si.edu](http://www.cwihp.si.edu).

<sup>46</sup> This becomes apparent in later meetings between Somali Ambassador Addou and members of the Carter Administration. "National Security Council memorandum for the Record on the Meeting of

The issue of Somali-Ethiopian relations and Soviet presence on the Horn immediately focussed the attention of the National Security Council staff. The White House's expert on the Horn was Paul B. Henze, a former diplomat in Ethiopia, who served as a senior member of Brzezinski's team. Henze proved to be an astute assessor of the situation in the Horn and provided the National Security Advisor with comprehensive background and recommendations on the situation in the region. Brzezinski listened to much of this counsel, but his predilection for viewing small conflicts as part of the larger Cold War led him to ignore most of Henze's advice as it tended to deal with direct Ethiopian-American or Somali-American relations instead of taking into consideration superpower relations. Still, some of Henze's recommendations are evident in Brzezinski's later arguments. Already in February 1977, he was recommending that the United States try to exploit Somali concern about the prospect of Soviet arms for Ethiopia. He hoped that the Soviets' attempts to broker an agreement between the two sides would backfire. As American-Somali relations were too strained, he proposed involving Saudi Arabia, an ally of both the United States and Somalia. "Most encouraging thing that can happen (and already seems to be happening to some extent) is for the Saudis to start playing a role in Somalia. They have the money to buy Somalia away from the Soviets if they really wanted to."<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime, Washington learned that Fidel Castro had visited the Horn in March 1977 in an unsuccessful attempt to mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia.<sup>48</sup>

According to East German documents, the American intelligence on the visit was

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Somali Ambassador Addou with President Carter. June 16, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material* Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL). Atlanta, GA.

<sup>47</sup> "Memorandum from Paul Henze to David Aaron. February 22, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>48</sup> "Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to Paul Henze. March 24, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

accurate. Castro, full of revolutionary fervour after the success of Cuban support for the MPLA in Angola, hoped to form a communist federation in the Red Sea region, including Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Yemen, but met with heavy resistance from Somalia. The Cuban leader conveyed his impressions of Mengistu and Siad Barre to the East German leader, Erich Honecker, in a meeting in East Berlin on 3 April 1977. Castro was impressed with the Ethiopian revolution and expressed his admiration for Mengistu and his bold and brutal assumption of power on 3 February. On the other hand, the Cuban leader had only disdain for Siad Barre, to whom he routinely referred as a "chauvinist."<sup>49</sup> In light of these new developments, Brzezinski asked Henze to prepare a Presidential Review Memorandum for a Policy Review Meeting on the Horn of Africa scheduled for 11 April.

Also at this time, the administration had to consider the issue of Kagnev Station, the American communications post in Asmara (in present day Eritrea). During the Nixon administration, (while still enjoying good relations with Emperor Haile Selassie) the United States had ceased most of its activities at Kagnev and intended to withdraw completely from it by the end of 1978. Only a few American officials remained there in early 1977. Secretary of Defense Brown expressed his desire to withdraw entirely at this point. He cited the growing threat to US personnel at the station as an immediate concern, insisting as well that the communication station was really no longer needed.<sup>50</sup> The National Security Council staff and the State Department concurred that Washington would lose no political ground in approving the withdrawal. In fact, Henze acknowledged that at this point the United

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<sup>49</sup> 'Conversation between Fidel Castro and Erich Honecker, April 3, 1977, House of the Central Committee, Berlin.' Translated and published in Odd Arne Westad, ed. *The Fall of Détente*.

<sup>50</sup> 'Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 21 March 1977.' Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material Horn/Special Box 1*. JCPL.

States had very little influence over events in Eritrea or Ethiopia.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, some members of the EPMG perceived this as an indication that the U.S. had lost interest in Ethiopia. Deputy Foreign Minister Dawit Wolde Giorgis explained the Ethiopian assessment.

In April 1977, the US showed how little interest it had in the region by deciding to close Kagnew Station... The timing was a surprise to us. The Foreign office had been aware since 1973 that the United States was planning to close the base, but no one in our government expected that such a move would be carried out just as Somalia was mobilizing for invasion.<sup>52</sup>

For those advocating maintaining ties with the Ethiopian regime, this does not necessarily indicate a miscalculation on the part of the Carter administration. The same official indicated that Mengistu was determined to break relations with the United States under any circumstances. Indeed, the virulently anti-American hardliners in his regime hoped to provoke a strong response. “American opposition and intervention was in fact desired, because the greatness of our Revolution could only be measured by the reaction it generated from the imperialist camp.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the American disengagement from Kagnew was the only viable option. The only other possibility was disengaging from Ethiopia entirely in a more pointed manner.

The cruel nature of Mengistu and the vicious tactics of his regime had not yet fully captured the imagination of the international press. Still, a small group of intrepid correspondents reported from the trouble spots of Eritrea and Western Ethiopia, trying to call attention to the daily struggles of life under the Derg. Some even called upon the Carter administration to make choices that could undermine Mengistu’s ability to crush the Eritrean rebellion. Dan Connell, reporting from

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<sup>51</sup> “Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to Paul Henze. March 31, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material* Horn/Special Box 1. JCPL.

<sup>52</sup> Giorgis. *Red Tears*. p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Giorgis, p. 35.

Asmara for the American news magazine, *the Nation*, exhorted Washington to change its Ethiopia policy.

It is here [support of the Derg] that the Carter administration must meet head-on the challenge of living up to its campaign promises. The situation which the Carter people inherit is one in which geopolitical consideration of Soviet/American parity have *sic* consistently overridden local factors. America's relations with other peoples of the Third World have largely been determined on a global checkerboard of Soviet and American squares seen so abstractly as to blend one into another. Will this change radically under Carter? Will we now evaluate each situation according to criteria that include respect for a basic level of human rights?<sup>54</sup>

This idea of moving beyond Cold War tunnel vision was in the realm of discussion among experts on the region and had been a stated ideal for the new administration. Unfortunately, it was proving easier said than done, as any discussion in Washington relating to the Horn still seemed to involve the Soviet Union.

Despite these calls to keep Cold War considerations out of American policy, US regional allies pressed Washington to do the opposite. For example, on 6 April, Paul Henze and Gary Sick, the NSC Staff expert on the Middle East and North Africa, met with the Sudanese Foreign Minister, Mansur Khalid, for a general discussion of security issues in the Red Sea region. Khalid expressed confidence that the Soviets' attempts at maintaining good relations with Somalia and Ethiopia would backfire. When queried as to what he thought the United States should be doing in the region, he gave three suggestions. He believed that Washington should assist moderate states in increasing their defence capabilities, aid economic development, and pressure the Soviets not to meddle in regional affairs. Henze and Sick were very impressed with

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<sup>54</sup> Connell, Dan. "Ethiopia, Eritrea, & U.S. Policy: The Fifteen-Year War." *The Nation*, 19 March 1977, found in *Taking on the Superpowers: Collected Articles on the Eritrean Revolution (1976-1982)*, Vol. 1.

Khalid as an observer of events on the Horn.<sup>55</sup> The Sudanese Foreign Minister had told them everything they wanted to hear.

In late spring of 1977, the administration viewed events on the Horn through two separate lenses. From the beginning, the National Security Council staff treated the situation as one of Cold War competition. Faced with the prospect of improving Soviet-Ethiopian relations, Brzezinski was keen to woo Somalia away from the Soviet camp. However, the administration also treated the Horn as part of its Middle Eastern policy. A peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was a top priority for Carter and his Middle Eastern policy reflected his desire to keep other issues at bay and his allies happy while he concentrated that. As such, the Security Council memoranda did not yet sound the alarm at a pattern of Soviet intervention, but focussed instead on issues of maintaining strong ties in the Middle East and protecting American interests in Ethiopia.

The idea that there may be a complete swap of alliances in the region was becoming less and less absurd by April. When Carter had come into office, the State Department would have put little stock in the prospect of a thaw in US-Somali relations. Also, while relations with Ethiopia were heavily strained, Washington was still hoping to maintain ties with Addis Ababa in hope of a change in Ethiopian leadership. Quickly though, Mengistu's brutal assumption of power and the accolades bestowed upon him by the leaders of the socialist countries for his audacity, signalled a real solidification of Ethiopia's alliance with the Eastern bloc. Castro's failed attempt to create a Marxist union in the Horn proved that Siad Barre despised Ethiopia more than he embraced international socialism and suddenly the Somali leader was exploring his options with the United States. The Carter administration,

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<sup>55</sup> "Memorandum from Paul Henze and Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski." April 6, 1977. Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material* Horn/Special Box 1. JCPL.

though filled with good intentions and a determination not to inject the Cold War further into Africa, began to think in terms of superpower relations anyway. Pressure from regional allies, the manipulations of Siad Barre and finally the fact that Soviet Union *was* gaining influence in the region all contributed to the American thought process, undermining its stated policy.

### **Ending Military Aid to Ethiopia**

The Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-21, prepared by the staff of several departments under the leadership of Paul Henze, examined policy options for the United States with the rapidly developing events in the Horn of Africa. The issue from the beginning was one of Superpower competition. The authors summarised the nature of the problem as “the competition between the U.S. and the USSR for influence in Africa has been superimposed on the welter of ethnic, religious, ideological, and territorial *incompatibilities* existing between, among and within the African states of the Horn of Africa.”<sup>56</sup> The authors implied that Washington and Moscow had not imposed their competition on the region, but that it inadvertently occurred. The document was thorough, taking into account American interests, Soviet interests, Chinese interests, and the interests of the regional players including Sudan, Kenya and Israel, indicating that the administration viewed the events in both an African and a Middle Eastern context. According to the document, the United States’ allies in the region feared Soviet involvement in the region. Kenya and Sudan feared spill-over effects into their territories; Israel feared a rise in pan-Islamic sentiment.

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<sup>56</sup> “Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-21. April 1, 1977.” (PRM/NSC-21) *The Carter-Brezhnev Collection*. NSA.

PRM/NSC 21 insisted that Ethiopia's main interest was to consolidate the power of the EPMG. The NSC acknowledged that the reason the EPMG was so suspicious of the United States was because "our quarter-century of close friendship and of generous support for Haile Selassie make it difficult for the PMAC [Provisional Military Administrative Council] to believe that the U.S. can sincerely desire a cooperative relationship with those who overthrew the Emperor."<sup>57</sup>

However, the Ford and Carter administrations never really attempted to do more to reassure the EPMG of its sincerity. As it was, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was confident that the EPMG would survive and therefore both were wary of giving support. Missing from the American discussion on its relations with Ethiopia is any appreciation that there might be real ideological basis for the regime's switch from American to Soviet patronage, which could have aided those who argued that the Soviet Union was acting on opportunity not grand design. The section on Somalia mentioned the idea of a "Greater Somalia," but also alluded to Somalia readjusting its relations with the Soviet Union and with the United States. The memorandum was written before the Somali ambassador contacted the Department of State with the aim of improving bilateral affairs.

The NSC staff presumed that Soviet interests included the "politico-strategic advantages of replacing the United States as the dominant foreign influence in Ethiopia."<sup>58</sup> Again, there was no discussion of any ideological motive for supporting the Ethiopian Revolution. The authors perceived the Soviets as hesitating to take advantage of the increasingly Marxist-leaning government, carefully weighing this opportunity with its commitment to Somalia, and ultimately deciding that they could

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<sup>57</sup> PRM/NSC-21.

<sup>58</sup> PRM/NSC-21.

balance the two.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the NSC staff interpreted China's interest in Africa as desiring to weaken Soviet influence so that it could play the key role as champion of Third World interests. While Beijing had no problem with letting Washington combat the Soviets in these conflicts, it did not want to be too closely identified with the United States in Africa as it feared that the Americans were identified with racist white regimes in southern Africa.<sup>60</sup>

Washington had the general sense that it had lost Ethiopia, but the situation was still volatile and could change at any time. The memorandum proposed four policy options for dealing with Ethiopian intransigence. First, the United States could "hang in there" and continue to sell arms, provide military training, and issue economic aid. This was the option considered best in the case that the EPMG could not retain power. Second, Washington could terminate any military relationship with the EPMG. This option was thought to be popular with Ethiopia's neighbours, though the policymakers feared that it would lead to a complete break with Addis Ababa. The third option was finding a middle ground between the first two. This would have entailed providing a third of a \$4 million Ethiopian ammunition request and indicating that the remainder would be contingent upon Ethiopia's acknowledgement of American human rights concerns as well as improved access to top EPMG officials. The final option involved a gradual termination of military relations.<sup>61</sup>

In the PRC meeting on 11 April, Secretaries Vance and Brown, and National Security Advisor Brzezinski agreed not to pull completely out of Ethiopia as they

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<sup>59</sup> Soviet Documents indicate that the USSR was trying to balance commitments to both Ethiopia and Somalia. In a meeting between Soviet Ambassador to Somalia, G.V. Samsonov, and President Siad Barre, the discussion is still amicable with the Somali downplaying a visit with United States Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, and still promising not to put regular troops in the Ogaden. Though Siad Barre continually criticized Mengistu, there is little indication that Somalia was about to break ties with the U.S.S.R. "Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Somalia G.V. Samsonov and Somali President Siad Barre, 23 February 1977." *Cold War International History Project*. [www.cwihp.edu](http://www.cwihp.edu)

<sup>60</sup> PRM/NSC-21

<sup>61</sup> PRM/NSC-21

hoped to be able to reassert American influence should another government come to power. However, Mengistu's overtures towards the Soviet Union and his anti-American rhetoric meant that the United States could not justify further support for the regime. In light of this, the administration would delay on its promise of ammunition without telling Mengistu that this was the case. They instructed the American ambassador to Somalia to have a forthright conversation with Siad Barre as to Somalia's needs should it disengage from its Soviet ties. In a handwritten note on Brzezinski's summary of the meeting for Carter, the President wrote, "Sounds too easy on Ethiopia. Why just 'wait and see'?"<sup>62</sup> This early in his presidency, Carter was expressing impatience in dealing with America's foes but also betraying sensitivity to coddling such a brutal regime.

In a telling note to Brzezinski, Paul Henze updated his chief on the list of military aid promised to Ethiopia and stopped by 19 April. He wrote, "I am struck, considering how long the situation in Ethiopia has been deteriorating, how much we still had in the pipeline. Once military aid programs get geared up, they just go on and on... and on..."<sup>63</sup> Ending military aid was a bigger step than the administration had thought. This statement illustrated how much military aid was going to Ethiopia without apparent reflection, which would certainly have repercussions in the coming war with Somalia. It also opened Henze's eyes to the difficulties inherent in experimenting with military aid, which had added relevance in dealing with Somali requests for such aid.

President Carter continued to push for a stronger stand against Ethiopia, but events accelerated too quickly for it to matter. The President wanted to inform Addis

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<sup>62</sup> "Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter regarding the PRC meeting on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. April 11, 1977," published in Odd Arne Westad, ed. *The Fall of Détente*.

<sup>63</sup> "Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbig Brzezinski. April 21, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material Horn/Special Box 1*. JCPL.

Ababa that Washington was suspending the military aid program, but Secretary Brown thought that they should stick by the PRC decision to avoid an official pronouncement in order to protect the lives of Americans in Ethiopia. The point became moot as American sources discovered that the EPMG was going to close the USIA and the Asmara consulate, expel American military advisors and reduce the embassy to a skeleton staff within 72 hours. Any attempt to pre-empt this move could have jeopardized the American intelligence source.<sup>64</sup> In the end, Washington said nothing and Mengistu ordered that the US mission in Ethiopia to be sharply reduced. Ethiopia Deputy Foreign Minister Giorgis believed this to be a “risky personal decision” on the part of Mengistu, given the impending Somali invasion. “He took a big gamble and almost lost.”<sup>65</sup> The real loser was the Carter administration as it found itself unable to affect the situation. Still, the problem of Kagnew station was resolved as the United States had no choice but to withdraw from it and the Asmara Consulate by the end of April.

A few days after the military regime had kicked out the Americans; the National Security Council staff discussed whether or not to break relations entirely, but again decided to maintain some connections in support of the American-educated Ethiopians and American interests there. In addition, many international organizations, including the Organisation for African Unity and the UN, were located in Addis Ababa. The United States continued to agonise over this issue, yet each time decided to do nothing. Though it is doubtful that a strong response would have had much of an effect on the Derg, the administration continually missed the chance to at least take the high road in its dealings with Mengistu’s brutal regime. In addition, the Derg used the American military equipment in its merciless repression of the ever-

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<sup>64</sup> “Note from Paul Henze to Zbig Brzezinski. April 22, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>65</sup> Giorgis, p. 37.

growing rebellion in Eritrea, a harsh reality that went against Carter's hope for a more humane world.

By early May, the foreign policy and defence teams still had made no decision regarding the military equipment in the pipeline. President Carter had noted an intelligence report that implied that Mengistu had only accepted Soviet Aid in order to induce the USSR to pressure the Somalis not to invade the Ogaden. The President enquired as to whether he should write a cautionary note to Mengistu.<sup>66</sup> Once again, Carter was attempting to be proactive, but received advice to the contrary. Henze believed that the intelligence item was an unreliable piece of Israeli reporting, warning that "[t]he Israelis persist in trying to persuade us that Mengistu is just a simple benign nationalist whom we really ought to support, no matter what he does to his own people or to his country's basic interests." He noted that Mengistu had left for Moscow that morning, 3 May, and Washington should see how the visit went before deciding any future moves.<sup>67</sup> Shortly after the visit, the Soviets started shipping arms to Ethiopia and a small number of Cuban military advisors arrived. Once again, events moved faster than American decision making.

In June, the State and Defense Departments reviewed the military aid program to Ethiopia and decided to allow two categories of goods to be shipped to the Ethiopians, while suspending or cancelling all others. Both categories involved goods for which Ethiopia had already paid and whose titles were already in the name of the Ethiopian government. Nothing that the United States considered lethal was among the items approved. Mengistu was apparently surprised and pleased at the shipment

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<sup>66</sup> "Memorandum from Zbig Brzezinski to the Secretary of State. May 2, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>67</sup> "Note from Paul Henze to Zbig Brzezinski. May 3, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

though it had little effect on his relations with Washington.<sup>68</sup> Ironically, approval of the shipment coincided with the Somali invasion of the Ogaden.

The administration's frustration in dealing with the Ethiopian arms shipments and its inability to be proactive in protecting American interests in Addis Ababa illustrated the impotence of the American position in the Horn. Had Mengistu's government fallen, Washington and its "wait and see" policy might have proven a good one. In light of over a decade of rule by the brutal dictator, the "wait and see" policy was instead an example of the ability of a small regional player's ability to use the Cold War to manipulate a superpower. Ethiopia had managed to expel American programs on its own terms, continue to import arms from the United States, and avoid major sanctions against it, all while advocating a flagrant anti-American policy.

### **Somali Overtures to the U.S**

While the US government debated how to deal with Ethiopia, Somalia was making some overtures to the Carter administration. Somali Ambassador Addou met with Secretary Vance the first week of May and then with Vice-President Mondale on 11 May. The Ambassador was direct in his depiction of Somalia's aims for the self-determination of all Somali people in the Horn. According to Addou, President Siad Barre was put off by Soviet pressure to respect Ethiopia's borders. (At this point, there was rebellion in the Ogaden by ethnic-Somalis, though Siad Barre had yet to send regular Somali militias). Addou insisted that the administration respond within a month as to whether the United States would provide some military aid, which would allow Somalia to reduce its reliance upon the USSR. Mondale and Vance also encouraged the Somalis to buy military equipment elsewhere with US support. While

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<sup>68</sup> "Memorandum from Brzezinski to the Vice President. July 13, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

the ambassador seemed amenable to this, he repeatedly emphasised the need for the symbol of US military support, no matter how small.<sup>69</sup> The Somali ambassador was very clear as to Somalia's intentions toward the Ogaden and he could have perceived the promise of arms from the United States as tacit approval for an invasion. The United States had nothing to gain from encouraging a Somali invasion of the Ogaden and quite a bit to lose, but some officials were so focussed on removing the Soviets from Berbera (a port, airfield and communications centre in Somalia) that they did not use the threat of withholding support as a means of deterring Somalia from invading its neighbour. This rather serious diplomatic blunder proved the danger of viewing the problems of this remote region with an eye to Soviet-American relations.

Vice-President Mondale recommended that Washington give Mogadishu token *direct* military aid to test its sincerity in expelling the Soviets.<sup>70</sup> Henze and Brzezinski, on the other hand, remained sceptical on sending *direct* aid. The National Security Advisor pointed out that "Somalia is already one of the most heavily armed countries in Africa and makes no secret of its territorial claims against its neighbours." Further, he noted that Congress would not likely approve any such endeavour. Instead the National Security Council staff proposed that Somalia's needs be met with Saudi money to purchase European and American arms.<sup>71</sup> Henze and Brzezinski, at least, understood that the possibility of Somalia invading its neighbours was very real. It is clear that Henze, who had long experience in Ethiopia, did not trust the Somalis, referring to them as "wily nomads."<sup>72</sup> In an interview in May 1998,

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<sup>69</sup> "Memorandum from the Vice-President to the President. May 12, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>70</sup> "Memorandum from the Vice-President to the President. May 13, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material* JCPL.

<sup>71</sup> "Memorandum from Brzezinski to the President. May 14, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>72</sup> "Memorandum from Henze to Brzezinski. May 14, 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

he described Siad Barre as, “an old Somali camel trader in mentality.”<sup>73</sup> The State Department had reached to the same conclusion and Vance also referred to Siad Barre as “the wily Somali dictator.”<sup>74</sup> Despite this mistrust toward Somalia and its leader, no one in the administration suggested that the United States should not help Somalia at all. As Vance put it in his memoirs, “the temptation to agree at once to Siad Barre’s request—and perhaps to replace the Soviets in Berbera—was strong, but my reaction was to act with caution.”<sup>75</sup> While administration officials worried about inadvertently being seen as supporting the wrong side of a conflict, they didn’t consider refusing Somalia outright.

Ambassador Addou requested a meeting with the President and at the State Department’s recommendation, Carter accepted. It would be a quid pro quo for an earlier meeting in Mogadishu between Siad Barre and American Ambassador Loughran. The State Department noted that Egypt, the Sudan and particularly Saudi Arabia would applaud the reception.<sup>76</sup> These “moderate” Arab states supported their fellow Muslims in Somalia and encouraged any counter to rising Soviet influence in the region, fearing the appeal of communism could undermine their own regimes.

President Carter met with Ambassador Addou on 16 June 1977 in the Oval Office. The Ambassador opened with a long statement, expressing his admiration for Carter’s stance on human rights, and focussing upon the problem of human rights in Ethiopia, especially the two million Somalis in the Ogaden who, he claimed, wanted to be free of Ethiopian rule. (Again, he was giving a not so subtle hint as to Somali intentions.) He continued to play the Soviet card. His final position was that “[w]e

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<sup>73</sup> “Interview with Paul Henze.” *Cold War Interviews*. NSA. [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-17/henze1.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-17/henze1.html)

<sup>74</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. p. 73

<sup>75</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*. p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> “Memorandum from the State Department to Brzezinski. June 2, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

must either resist Soviet pressure or succumb. We hope not to have to succumb, which would be contrary to our national heritage.”<sup>77</sup> For his part, the President requested that Somalia accept a military attaché to the American embassy and convey to President Siad Barre that the United States would like to work with Saudi Arabia and European allies to ensure that Somalia had “adequate defence capabilities without relying on the Soviet Union.”<sup>78</sup> At the end of the meeting, President Carter asked the Ambassador to take a gift of a volume of US satellite photography to his president.

Ambassador Addou had clearly interpreted this meeting differently than had the Americans. The Somalis responded to the vague American promise with a more specific request for arms a month later on 9 July. By this time, Somali militias had entered the Ogaden. Paul Henze denied emphatically, however, that the United States had given a “green light” for Somalia to invade its neighbour.<sup>79</sup> Astonishingly, Washington was still considering the arms request. The State Department hoped to “signal our continued interest in improved relations” through a meeting between Brzezinski and Addou upon the latter’s return to Washington.<sup>80</sup> Henze, on the other hand, recommended that the National Security Advisor should not receive the Somali Ambassador but instead delegate a lower-level State Department official convey American displeasure at the Somali invasion.<sup>81</sup> For the time being at least, Brzezinski listened to his own advisor.

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<sup>77</sup> “National Security Council memorandum for the Record on the Meeting of Somali Ambassador Addou with President Carter. June 16, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>78</sup> “National Security Council memorandum for the Record on the Meeting of Somali Ambassador Addou with President Carter. June 16, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>79</sup> Henze. *Layers of Time*, p. 297.

<sup>80</sup> “State Department Memorandum for Brzezinski on an appointment with him for Somalia Ambassador Addou, July 12, 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>81</sup> “Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on an appointment with the Somali Ambassador, 13 July 1977” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

These events illustrated how eagerly the United States wanted to embrace Somalia. The Cold War and in particular renewed strains in Soviet-American bilateral relations brought the competition for the Third World to the forefront once again. As SALT talks had stalled and American criticism of Soviet human rights violations was relegated to rhetorical disagreement, the Third World became an area where both sides felt they could act. Although each of Carter's advisors warned the President to act cautiously, none could resist the temptation for an American gain from a Soviet loss despite their mistrust of Siad Barre and his obvious attempts to manipulate the situation. As a result, Siad Barre was in a stronger position than Carter to dominate Somali-American relations and Washington found itself having to quickly backtrack and engage in damage control over its apparent encouragement of the Somali invasion.

## **Conclusion**

Jimmy Carter had come to office promising to usher in a new and honest era in American politics. On the surface, his rhetoric of refusing to support despicable (though anti-communist) dictators abroad, advance the cause of human rights and strive toward the reduction of the superpowers' nuclear arsenals appeared to be a foreign policy that would be well-received abroad, if not necessarily among conservatives at home. Indeed, Carter did bring a certain integrity back to the White House as he remained honest and open in his dealings with Congress, the American people and international leaders. Yet, most of his foreign policy objectives went awry from the start. The more cynical and secretive great power politics practiced by his immediate predecessors and their main foreign policy practitioner, Henry Kissinger, had been rather disastrous when it came to winning over the Third World. However,

those same secretive great power politics had worked fairly well when dealing with other great powers, in particular the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Carter and his advisors understood that bringing morality back into the fold of US conduct was right and necessary to improve the American image abroad. Still, they were able to recognize the foreign policy successes of the Nixon-Ford years, though unfortunately they failed to acknowledge *why* they were successful, instead focussing on why they were unsuccessful elsewhere. Thus, though the continuation of détente was a stated goal, relations with the Soviet Union got off to an awkward start.

By mid-July 1977, barely six months into his Presidency, détente was in worse trouble than when Carter had started. His well-intentioned but naïve attempt to achieve bold arms reductions through SALT II was forcibly rejected by the Soviets and Carter took this insult personally. His human rights campaign had already offended Moscow and put the Soviets on the defensive when it came to SALT negotiations. Though he did not link human rights progress to other aspects of bilateral relations, the Soviets felt that he had. In addition, in spite of a stated determination not to view all Third World issues through the prism of the Cold War, the administration found itself doing exactly that in the Horn of Africa.

From the outset, Carter's team viewed relations with Ethiopia and Somalia as part of its competition for the loyalty of the Third World. As Mengistu's regime moved further and further into the Soviet camp, the United States made no effort to resist its expulsion from Ethiopia, while entertaining the opportunity presented by Somalia's complete about-face. Prior to coming to office, Carter and his advisors planned to emphasise human rights as the cornerstone of their Africa policy and avoid the mistakes of their predecessors in Angola. Yet, the administration did not discuss altruistic or economic reasons for staying involved with the Horn. It was entirely a

strategic decision based on its proximity to the Middle East and American rivalry with the Soviets for influence within the Third World. At this point, the United States had essentially no influence in Ethiopia and had tacitly agreed to arm a country that had just violated the territorial integrity of another country with a large-scale invasion. The Soviets, on the other hand, had consistently encouraged Somalia to engage in dialogue with Ethiopia instead of resorting to armed conflict, and were setting up positive relations with the EPMG.<sup>82</sup> Though their intent to create a united socialist region in the Horn of Africa failed, they were able to disassociate themselves from the aggressor when Somalia invaded the Ogaden. Herbert Malin, the Political Counsellor of the US Embassy in Ethiopia told the Soviet Acting Charge d’Affaires in Ethiopia, S. Sinitsyn, that Mengistu’s visit to Moscow was a “Soviet success.”<sup>83</sup> In a Cold War sense, the Soviets had won the strategically more important ally, though, in an ideological sense, they had failed to erase national and ethnic borders in a socialist revolution. Not one of the players was really in control of the situation, but from the American perspective, the USSR was able to exercise greater influence than the United States. Still, the situation was not yet alarming enough for Washington to implement Brzezinski’s idea of “reciprocity.”

The pattern of American decision-making became readily apparent during these first six months. Brzezinski had established himself as the advisor in the best position to garner the President’s ear. In an unprecedented position for the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, he chaired the Special Coordination Committee meetings and had the last say in preparing final memorandums on all

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<sup>82</sup>The policy is firmly established in the “Third African Department, Soviet Foreign Ministry, Information Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial Disputes, 2 February 1977” conveyed in meetings with Somali Vice-President Samanta, late May-early June 1977. *Cold War International History Project*. [www.cwihp.edu](http://www.cwihp.edu)

<sup>83</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Acting Charge d’affaires in Ethiopia S. Sinitsyn and Political Counsellor of the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, Herbert Malin, 9 May 1977.” *Cold War International History Project*. [www.cwihp.edu](http://www.cwihp.edu)



meetings dealing with national security. Though they did not yet play a large role in decision-making in the summer of 1977, the fissures between Vance and Brzezinski that would influence the remaining years of Carter's Presidency were evident. Vice-President Mondale was already involved in foreign policy issues, particularly in the Horn. Finally, there are several indications of rashness or at the least impatience on Carter's part, in contrast to the more cautious approach of his advisors. The President wanted to make some bold moves (as evidenced by his miscalculated attempt to take SALT much further than the Vladivostok proposals), but his advisors tried to look at the larger picture.

It is highly doubtful that anything could have been done to salvage the American relationship with Ethiopia and if it were not for the irrational fear of losing out to the Soviets, the US government would not have cared very much. Washington could have taken a stronger stand against Addis Ababa and its human rights violations, and withdrawn its AID programs and its embassy as a message to the Third World. At the very least, this would have been consistent with the ideals the administration had espoused in its Africa policy. The idea that the United States should remain in a position to reassert itself should Mengistu fall was not necessarily an unreasonable one given the instability of the regime, but the Ethiopian military's brutal use of American weapons against Eritrea flouted the very core of Carter's human rights policy. Additionally, Washington completely botched its dealings with Mogadishu. Siad Barre had never hidden his intention to conquer the Ogaden and his quest for American arms should have raised serious alarm bells in the administration. However, the National Security Council documents all demonstrate the US assumption that the conflict on the Horn was really an extension of the American and Soviet competition for the heart of the Third World. Within this thinking, the

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administration lost its moral compass, even though it knew Siad Barre was untrustworthy. Carter should have used the prospect of an arms deal to put pressure on the Somali leader not to invade Ethiopia. In that case, the United States would not have found itself denying that it had given a “green light” to the Somali invasion. Clearly, events dictated the administration’s decisions: rarely did the administration’s decisions ever dictate events. Still, in July 1977, the crisis might have been manageable had Washington had been able to look beyond Cold War considerations. There were not yet large numbers of Cuban troops on the ground. There was general agreement within the administration on the handling of the situation, and the conflict had not yet inserted itself into Soviet-American relations. This would all change during the next phase of crisis.

### **Chapter III**

**“We have expressed our concern to the Soviets in very strong terms.”**

The still inexperienced administration had committed a serious error in not anticipating that Siad Barre might take the initiative to invade the Ogaden after the United States had agreed to send arms to Somalia. The dictator's ambitions in the Ogaden were well-known and the connection with his requests for arms should have been obvious. The trap of operating within the narrow confines of competition with the Soviet Union discouraged creative thinking in dealing with individual countries on a case by case basis. This was the first major predicament for the Carter administration and it therefore set the stage for a major debate on the conduct of American foreign policy toward the Third World in the post-Vietnam era. During this next phase of the Horn of Africa crisis, a clear evolution of American policy became apparent. At the outset, the United States attempted to deal with Ethiopia and Somalia directly to encourage an end to the fighting. Not wanting to get too involved, the administration reached out to its allies to use their influence on the two parties, all done through diplomatic channels. By the end of Carter's first year in office, however, the United States had shifted its policy toward one where it alternately appealed to and threatened the Soviet Union, in a public setting, to end the conflict and get out of the region. The story of this evolution traces not only the events in the Horn and the Soviet Union's decision to get involved, but also the jockeying for influence taking place within the Carter administration.

Soviet-American bilateral relations were in limbo during the summer of 1977, and the effectiveness of the Carter administration's Third World policies could not yet be measured. In a move that caused obvious concern to the Soviet Union, Secretary Vance

visited Beijing in August to meet with Deng Xiaoping, but the meeting did not bear much fruit.<sup>1</sup> Carter also, in a reversal of the policies of the previous administrations, invited the Soviets back into negotiating a peace settlement for the Middle East. The United States had made some steps forward in establishing a rapprochement with Soviet ally, Cuba, by lifting travel restrictions and opening 'special interest sections' at foreign embassies in their respective capitals.<sup>2</sup> Such progress was stalled, though, as Washington was still concerned about Havana's Africa policy and the presence of Cuban troops in Angola. Carter was, however, making some advances on another campaign promise for the Third World, as he and Panamanian leader General Omar Torrijos completed a Neutrality Treaty that would eventually lead to the United States handing the Panama Canal back to Panama. The agreement was meant as a positive gesture to Latin America that US policy toward the region was altering its course for the better. Unfortunately for Carter, he had to spend a lot of political capital in order to get the treaty past the Senate, capital that he would need for SALT. Finally, the administration, during the spring and summer of 1977, had kept its word on promoting majority rule in southern Africa, first by supporting British efforts to settle the Rhodesia question and secondly by pressuring South African Prime Minister John Vorster in diplomatic meetings. The feared Soviet intervention in Rhodesia never materialized and Moscow did not even exercise its security council veto when the proposal for a settlement came to the UN.

Just prior to the Somali invasion of the Ogaden in what would become the second large-scale Soviet and Cuban involvement on the African continent, Cyrus Vance argued

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<sup>1</sup> Brzezinski used this to take control of US policy to China, the ramifications of which are discussed later.

<sup>2</sup> Castro even participated in a 5 hour interview with the renowned ABC News presenter, Barbara Walters in late May 1977.

that the United States should not view African conflict through the lens of Soviet-American relations.

A negative, reactive American policy that seeks only to oppose Soviet or Cuban involvement in Africa would be both dangerous and futile. Our best course is to help resolve the problems which create opportunities for external intervention.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the appearance of American encouragement of the Somali invasion did not assist in “resolv[ing] the problems which create opportunities for external intervention.” From the outset, all sides of the administration viewed the conflict as one of the Cold War even before the Soviet Union and Cuba put their people on the ground. Thus, the State Department’s more nuanced approach during this period found itself challenged by the increasingly vocal hard-line attitude of the National Security Advisor. Despite that, Carter still leaned toward Vance’s path in the months before the Soviets and Cubans sent advisors and troops to aid Ethiopia.

This chapter will address the second half of President Carter’s first year in office. During this time, Somali forces ventured deep into Ethiopian territory, Eritrean independence groups attempted to take advantage of Ethiopian preoccupation with Somalia by waging rebellion in the North, and the Soviet Union sent military advisors and Cuba sent troops to assist Mengistu’s Socialist regime. While African leaders were reticent to choose sides, the conflict took on Middle-Eastern significance as Israel gave military and economic support to Ethiopia and the Arab states supported their fellow Muslims in Somalia. In the United States, public opinion in the form of the press and the Congress took notice of the conflict in the Horn and the administration’s handling of it.

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<sup>3</sup> Vance, Cyrus. *Speech to the NAACP*. 1 July 77.

The events on the ground occurred at such a rapid pace that Carter was unable to influence them, leaving him merely able to respond.

Several factors influenced the administration's decision-making process in dealing with the Horn and with the Soviet Union during this period. First, the distinct experiences and personalities of Carter's advisors became more significant as the formerly subtle disagreements between Vance and Brzezinski on American policy toward the Soviet Union took clearer shape. Second, the innate institutional differences within the American foreign policy making bodies showed themselves. Third, American perceptions of Soviet actions, whether accurate or not, created an atmosphere in which inactivity was deemed unacceptable. Fourth, the effect of national security concerns on global strategic decisions lent the conflict additional weight. Finally, public opinion created pressure on the President to articulate a clear policy. These factors emerged during several phases. The first was the immediate response to the Somali invasion, during which the administration failed to out-rightly condemn Mogadishu. Next, the entire situation changed once Cuba and the Soviet Union came to Ethiopia's aid and the crisis truly became a Cold War issue. Then, the conflict became one of regional concern as the United States and its Middle Eastern allies struggled to agree on a course to counter Soviet intervention. Lastly, the Carter administration brought the issue into the fold of Soviet-American bilateral relations, hoping to use *détente* to cajole Moscow into withdrawing.

The US approach to the crisis in the Horn during this period demonstrated the American lack of faith in *détente* and the inability of the United States to consider the Soviet Union as a partner rather than a competitor. Washington did not reach out to

Moscow to propose that they work together to end the war in the Ogaden until well after the Soviets and Cubans had chosen to assist Ethiopia. By that time, the United States just looked as if it were grasping at straws. It is not clear that the Soviets would have agreed had Washington proposed such mediation in the summer of 1977. Certainly Moscow was looking for a way to end the conflict on its own, given its relationships with both sides, and it may have welcomed American cooperation.<sup>4</sup> Still, the Soviet Union was the one in a position of influence and may have deliberately kept the United States out of any attempt at arbitration, much as Washington had done to Moscow in the Middle East peace process. Détente was supposed to encourage the superpowers to reach out to each other to settle third party conflicts, yet neither took that step. This was the chance to at least make an attempt at using their combined political presence to end the conflict. If the United States even considered the possibility, no discussion appears in any of the available documents. Washington saw only competition when it dealt with Moscow.

### **US Response to the Ogaden War**

After the Somali invasion of Ethiopia, the Carter administration hoped to distance itself from the impression of having encouraged Mogadishu. It was in the American interest also to find a quick end to the conflict before it could balloon into something larger, though it would not have been beneficial if it were the Soviet Union which was able to achieve it. In order to formulate a policy, the United States attempted to understand the relative strengths of Somali and Ethiopian forces and the likely response of their mutual

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<sup>4</sup> In several conversations with a Somali delegation to Moscow, Soviet officials did try to encourage a peaceful settlement to the affair. Soviet officials also agreed that the USSR had no incentive to choose sides. Moscow did, however, agree to provide substantial arms to Addis Ababa at the same time, so the messages, at best, were mixed. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issues 8-9, Winter 1996/97, pp. 66-76.

patron, the Soviet Union. Of course, the President had to rely upon an assessment of what was happening behind the scenes. This information was inevitably based upon *perceptions* of what was happening, which may or may not have resembled what was *actually* happening. Additionally, the nature of the different agencies within the American government ensured that each had different interpretations of the available intelligence on the Horn of Africa. The National Security Council staff, the State Department, and the CIA each viewed the situation in its own way which then produced at times conflicting policy recommendations.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for Carter, these distinctions had a paralysing effect.

In early August, CIA analysts surmised that the Soviet Union would continue to try to negotiate a cease-fire, though American Intelligence suspected that this strategy would backfire due to the depth of ethnic and nationalistic feeling in the region. Specifically, they believed that the USSR “will continue to deliver on military supplies they have agreed to send to Somalia, but will stand back from new engagements, while maintaining, though not necessarily increasing rapidly unless Mengistu’s situation becomes more desperate, their supply line through Eastern Europe to Ethiopia.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the analysts guessed that Somalia would not be in a rush to oust the USSR from its base at Berbera, which could potentially encourage Ethiopia to show renewed interest in the West for economic and technical assistance, though most likely Mengistu would look elsewhere in the socialist camp.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Department of Defense did not really weigh in on the matter, presumably because military intervention on the part of the U.S. was still unthinkable so soon after Vietnam.

<sup>6</sup> “Interagency Assessment of the Ethiopian-Somali Situation” by the National Intelligence Officer for Africa for the Representatives of the National Foreign Intelligence Board. 8 Aug 1977. CREST. NAII.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Also, during late August, Paul Henze produced a memorandum titled “Whither Ethiopia” for the National Security Council staff. Several aspects of the memo are striking. First, Henze over-estimated the precariousness of Mengistu’s regime to the point that he believed that Soviet and Cuban aid would make little difference. “That Mengistu is going to fall, however, now seems inevitable.” Second, he indicated that the Ethiopian leader had made recent overtures to the United States. Recognizing Mengistu’s desperation, Henze maintained that the administration could not support his regime. “[Mengistu] is a bloody tyrant and a failure besides.” However, he advised Brzezinski that Washington should proactively support Ethiopia by encouraging regime change. He suggested that the Israelis might have the channels that the United States lacked and therefore might be in a position to express American interest in establishing relations with a more humane government.<sup>8</sup> Though Henze referred to regional concerns, he hoped to consult regional allies mostly with an aim of marginalising Soviet influence. The memo illustrated two important erroneous perceptions on the part of the US Government. First, Mengistu’s government was about to fall. Second, the USSR and Cuba would not send enough aid to make a difference. Though he suggested ways to be proactive, these misperceptions doomed any such activity to failure.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time that Paul Henze was writing his assessment of the situation in the Horn, Arthur T. Tienken, the American Chargé d’Affaires in Addis Ababa did

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<sup>8</sup>“Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Whither Ethiopia?* 17 Aug. 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material* Horn/Special Box 1. JCPL.

<sup>9</sup> During this period there is also a strange story of a planned CIA coup to topple Mengistu that became available through the release of Soviet documents to the Cold War International History Project. The Ethiopians brought the plot, which reads like a John Le Carré novel, to the attention of the Soviet Union. Paul Henze believed that it was rather farcical and noted that Mengistu clearly did not believe it as he reached out to the United States at this point, but it is unclear where this piece of intelligence originated. See “Memorandum of Conversation with Ethiopian Foreign Secretary Dawit Wolde Giorgis, 17 September 1977, with Attached Memorandum on Operation “Fakel” (Torch).” *CWIHP Bulletin* Issues 8-9, pp. 80-81.

likewise. Illustrating the distrust between the State Department and the National Security Council, Henze in a memorandum to Brzezinski referred to Tienken as “polyanna-ish” and the Addis Ababa Embassy as “passive and uncreative.”<sup>10</sup> He acknowledged that the Foreign Service Officer had done well in diagnosing the problems of the Derg, but disagreed with Tienken’s recommendation that the United States respond to Ethiopian overtures and that Mengistu’s demise was not impending. The ideological differences between Brzezinski and Vance descended down the ladder of their respective posts.

The PRC met to review the situation in the Horn in late August. There were different perceptions as to the likely scenarios for the upcoming months in Ethiopia. The NSC staff believed that Mengistu was going to fall on his own and the State Department officials believed that the situation did not warrant intervention regardless of Mengistu’s future. Because of these differences, it is no surprise that the committee members once again recommended inaction on the part of the US government. The committee decided to maintain relations with Somalia, send small amounts of aid to Ethiopia, refrain from sending the requested Ambassador to Ethiopia, and reassess the situation in another month.<sup>11</sup> If they had known that a Soviet intervention was very real possibility, they may have opted for a different course.

One of the difficulties the United States faced in dealing with Ethiopia was the number of mixed messages its representatives on the ground received. Though Mengistu’s Red Terror had wiped out many of those sympathetic to the United States, relations between the two countries were long enough and deep enough that they had

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<sup>10</sup>“Memorandum from Henze to Brzezinski. 18 Aug. 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>11</sup> “Memorandum from Brzezinski to the President. 25 Aug. 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

permeated Ethiopian society. As such, there were still people in many professions who remained relatively friendly to the US government. Quite naturally, Americans in Ethiopia had more contact with such friends than with the more anti-American elements of society. These friends often conveyed the impression that a change was just around the corner or that after Mengistu fell, which he would, there would be an opening for improvement in relations. Rather tellingly, in a memorandum to Brzezinski, an official, whose name remains classified, shared an anecdote from a trip through the Horn from 6-16 September 1977. As the Americans were ready to board their plane at the airport in Addis Ababa, Berhane Deressa, head of the American section of the Ethiopian foreign ministry, whispered to the American a plea for the F-5E fighters that the United States had promised earlier. He murmured, “our Air Force will consider these more valuable than a hundred MiG’s and they will not forget the United States if you supply them—I assure you: there are people in our Air Force who understand the political factors here very well.”<sup>12</sup> Obviously, such entreaties had to be taken warily. It is important to note though that the US government *was* receiving indications that change could be imminent and that it still had friends inside Ethiopia. Clearly, given the long rule of Mengistu, American officials lent such anecdotes too much weight, but it wasn’t all based on wishful thinking.

After the United States learned of Somali aggression in the Ogaden, the administration had to address the issue of supplying Somalia with arms. The general consensus was to avoid arms shipments and ensure that Iran and other Somali allies did not send American-made equipment to the intransigent Siad Barre. However, the State

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<sup>12</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from [excised] on Horn of Africa Trip—Final Report, 19 September 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

Department and National Security Council staff differed in their recommendations on a Carter response to a thank you letter from the Somali leader. The former believed that Carter should write a letter politely chastising Siad Barre, while the latter contended that Carter not respond at all to the note to avoid committing himself to paper while the situation on the Horn was still “fluid.”<sup>13</sup> Carter did send the letter with a mild rebuke, couched in diplomatic language, hoping that Siad Barre’s “statesmanship and influence [would] help to bring about an early cessation of hostilities in the Ogaden and that a peaceful resolution of the dispute [could] be arranged.”<sup>14</sup> Administration officials were treading so carefully that they neglected to consider the easiest response available, vocal condemnation of a brazenly illegal invasion of another country. Failing to do so would come back to haunt them.

This brief period of late summer 1977 represented a missed chance for the United States. Cold War concerns led the administration to avoid loudly condemning the Somali invasion and at least attempting to use its influence to negotiate an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of the invading troops. Additionally, although détente was strained and the anticipated progress on arms control had not materialized, the United States and the Soviet Union were still working together on other issues and perhaps could have combined their influence to end the war. The administration just could not move beyond the Cold War mindset. Essentially, American inaction opened the door to the Soviet Union and Cuba to come to the aid of the victims and espouse support for the tenet of inviolable borders, a popular principle among the leaders of Africa. The State

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<sup>13</sup> “Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter 18 Aug. 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>14</sup> “Letter from President Carter to President Siad Barre. 18, Aug. 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

Department should have led the way on a dual Soviet-American proposal, but it was getting conflicting signals on the grounds, and it did not anticipate another Cuban-Soviet intervention so soon after Angola. Also, still smarting from the loss of its Ethiopian ally, the enticement for the United States to replace Addis Ababa with Mogadishu, former friend of Moscow, proved too tempting for the administration to really measure what was on offer. Though Vance recommended a public chastisement of the invasion, Brzezinski did not want to alienate Siad Barre in case they needed him later. Carter followed the State Department's recommendation, but the reprimand was so watered down that Brzezinski need not have worried about offending the Somali leader. Ultimately, this poor judgment and lack of foresight turned a regional quarrel into one with global ramifications.

### **The Ogaden War and the Soviet and Cuban Intervention**

During late summer 1977, despite inferior numbers, Somali troops were winning decisive victories on the ground over the besieged Ethiopian Army. By mid-September, the invaders had captured the eastern Ethiopian town of Jijiga, which left them poised to attack the key regional cities of Dire Dawa and Harar. The United States did not learn that the Soviet Union had acted quickly and begun a massive airlift of MiG-21 jet fighters, tanks, and other arms to its new ally in Addis Ababa until December, though it had started in September.<sup>15</sup> American intelligence was also slow in realizing that Soviet and Cuban military advisors had gone to Ethiopia, and South Yemeni troops helped shore up the Ethiopian frontline. Fidel Castro, impressed by Mengistu's revolutionary

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<sup>15</sup> "Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on Publicizing the Soviet Airlift to Ethiopia, 8 Dec 1977" and attached State Department cables. Folder: Horn Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

credentials, ultimately committed over 10,000 Cuban troops and advisors. Somalia had complained to the United States as early as August that there were large numbers of Cubans in Ethiopia, but Washington had no intelligence to confirm this allegation.<sup>16</sup> By mid-October, Ethiopia had enough support that they were able to halt the Somali advances, leaving the latter's troops bogged down outside Dire Dawa and Harar. The situation for Ethiopia was still a precarious one, however, and Mengistu paid a secret visit to Moscow on 30-31 October to plea for more military aid as well as assistance in establishing a true Marxist-Leninist state.<sup>17</sup> Still, the USSR needed to deal with Somalia before it could truly follow through on this.

American intelligence was aware that Moscow had increased its military commitment to Addis Ababa and that it openly blamed Somalia for the clash in the Ogaden. However, CIA analysts believed that the Soviet Union would not completely withdraw from Somalia because its base at Berbera was still so valuable. They surmised that Moscow was attempting to limit arms deliveries to Mogadishu in order to convince Somalia that it could not ultimately win the war, and then the Soviets would be in the best place to mediate a settlement. Still, the analysts suggested that the Soviets "may have little choice if they are to maintain their credibility with the Ethiopians but to strengthen Ethiopia sufficiently for it to launch a counterattack and push back Somali forces."<sup>18</sup> Most likely, the CIA was not prepared for the sheer scale of Soviet intervention and may have been surprised at how soon and the ease at which it happened. However, Mogadishu was about to make the decision for Moscow much more straightforward.

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<sup>16</sup> "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on Horn of Africa SitReps, 31 August 1977" Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>17</sup> "CPSU CC to SED CC, Information on 30-31 October 1977 Closed Visit of Mengistu Haile Mariam to Moscow, 8 November 1977." *CWIHP Bulletin* Issues 8-9 pp. 81-82.

<sup>18</sup> "USSR Weekly Review Supplement, 2 November 1977" CREST NAIL.

The Soviet Union had begun to reduce its military aid to Somalia in light of the invasion and the socialist giant's failure to mediate between its clients on the Horn. Still, Moscow remained in the awkward position of supplying arms to both sides of the conflict. Siad Barre, however, simplified the situation for Kremlin leaders by abrogating the Soviet-Somali Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on 13 November 1977, expelling the remaining Soviet military and technical advisors, and revoking Soviet access to the base at Berbera. Though this was not Moscow's desired outcome, it cleared the way for an expansion of its military commitment to its largest yet to a Third World country so far from its borders, sending over US\$1 billion worth of arms to Addis Ababa. In addition, the USSR sent nearly 1000 military advisors and a Soviet Army General, V.I. Petrov, to lead Ethiopian and Cuban troops in the counter-offensive.<sup>19</sup> Once Moscow had decided to commit, it did so whole-heartedly.

In this same period, the Eritrean insurgents took advantage of the preoccupation of the Ethiopian regular army to conquer parts of Eritrean territory. During the summer, the EPLF captured Keren, the second largest city in the province after Asmara and began to lay a siege around Massawa on the coast and Asmara in the highlands, essentially cutting off all overland routes to the capital. The peasant militias that represented Ethiopia were beset by mass defections. By mid-December, Eritrean forces had breached Ethiopian defences outside Massawa and appeared to be on the verge of victory. However, by the end of December, the Soviet Union was assisting Ethiopia with a massive airlift of heavy armour and artillery to Asmara and Russian MiG-21 jet fighters began to fire on the guerrillas turning the tide in favour of the Derg. The Soviets denied

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the Soviet decision to intervene and the arms supply and strategy, see Westad, *the Global Cold War*, and Robert Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: the Diplomacy of Intervention and disengagement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

this assistance in crushing the Eritrean insurgency, fearing backlash from other struggling Marxist liberation movements in the Third World.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the defeat of the rebellion, even through such brutal tactics as the use of napalm, had the effect of giving the Soviet Union a stable ally in Ethiopia, so ideological considerations fell by the wayside.

The Carter administration was caught by surprise with the scale of the Soviet and Cuban assistance to Ethiopia and the intervention sparked a fierce debate as to Moscow's motives. Brzezinski viewed Soviet involvement as one step in a systematic plan on the part of Moscow to win over more and more countries of the Third World to communism. In his memoirs, he argued that "the Soviets had earlier succeeded in sustaining, through the Cubans, their preferred solution in Angola, and they now seemed embarked on a repetition in a region in close proximity to our most sensitive interests."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Cyrus Vance recalled that "we in the State Department saw the Horn as a textbook case of Soviet exploitation of a local conflict. In the long run, however, we believed the Ethiopians would oust the Soviets from their country as had happened in Egypt and the Sudan."<sup>22</sup> Historians are divided on Soviet motivation. Raymond Garthoff sided with Vance in believing that this was a case of Moscow taking advantage of an opportunity to promote its own interest.<sup>23</sup> Odd Arne Westad, while not refuting this point, argued that the Soviets were indeed riding the success of their victory in Angola, giving them confidence to delve further into Africa.<sup>24</sup> Recently, Piero Gleijeses has expounded on Cuba's role, arguing that it acted independently of the USSR, though he still lacks the

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<sup>20</sup> Previously, the USSR had aided the EPLF while Haile Selassie was still in power.

<sup>21</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p. 178.

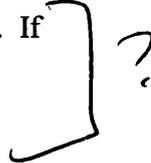
<sup>22</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Garthoff. *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 717.

<sup>24</sup> Westad. *The Global Cold War*, p. 253.

necessary documentary evidence.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of Moscow's motives, Brzezinski believed that the Soviets were breaking the rules of détente and Cyrus Vance did not. This point of contention became the trigger to their feud and their disputes over an appropriate response.

Certainly, the sheer scale of the Soviet assistance to Ethiopia demonstrated to the United States that this was different from previous Soviet behaviour. Moscow's prior examples of massive military intervention took place much closer to the Soviet border, and thus could be considered as under the guise of national security concerns. As such, a discussion in the United States on Soviet motivations was inevitable. Indeed the distinction between whether the Soviets were taking advantage of opportunity or embarking on a systematic takeover of vulnerable African countries was important. If the former were true, the United States could conceivably have downplayed the issue of the Horn and concentrated on stopping the seeds of revolution elsewhere on the continent. If the latter were true, then, short of ceding victory to the Soviets in the Cold War, the United States needed to challenge this Soviet expansion. It is also important that this unprecedented Soviet intervention occurred during the era of détente. For American policy makers, it raised the question as to whether détente was making it easier for the Soviets to intervene abroad. While subsequent history suggests that Moscow was simply taking advantage of opportunities to assist struggling socialist revolutions, subsequent history also suggests that détente created conditions that gave the Soviets the confidence to get involved in these struggles. By releasing some of the economic burden taken up by the arms race and ending some of the fear of direct confrontation with the United States,



<sup>25</sup> Gleijeses, Piero. "Moscow's Proxy?: Cuba and Africa 1975-1988" *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 8.4 (2006), p. 111.

the USSR finally had more freedom in its foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> Washington had not anticipated this response to détente and therefore its viability inevitably became a subject up for discussion.

### **American Public Opinion and Pressure from Allies**

The Soviet and Cuban involvement in Ethiopia brought the conflict into the public eye, and at the same time raised alarm bells in the capitals of the United States' Middle Eastern allies. The leaders of Egypt, the Sudan, and Saudi Arabia expressed their nervousness at the Soviet influence in the region. In a twist of irony, Israel renewed relations with the other non-Muslim country in the region and provided assistance to the Derg, despite the latter's attitude toward Israel's closest ally, the United States. The press reported from the Horn and members of Congress took notice, putting further pressure on the Carter administration to take some form of action. For critics of détente and specifically of SALT, the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia just served to prove that Moscow was an inherently expansionist enemy who needed to be contained not coddled. Many of these critics immediately advocated assisting Somalia against Ethiopia, Cuba and the Soviet Union, despite the fact that Mogadishu had started the war in the first place, which had given the Soviets an easy justification for helping out a friend.

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<sup>26</sup> This question of why the Soviets' policy toward the Third World became much more activist in the 1970s than previously was discussed at length in the series of conferences on the Carter-Brezhnev years. Russian scholar Ilya Gaiduk argued that Soviet policy could be explained "as a result of the parity between the Soviet Union and the United States—the nuclear, military parity between the Soviet Union and United States—for the first time, at the end of the 1960s, Soviet leaders could regard their country as a great power not only in name, but in real terms..." *Transcripts of Conference #3 of the Carter-Brezhnev Project. Global Competition and the Deterioration of U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1977-80.* Fort Lauderdale, FL. 23-26 March 1995, p. 65-66. Georgy Shakhnazarov, a member of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, also accented the height of Soviet military power and the need to use it. p. 38.

By October 1977, members of Congress began to weigh in on the Ogaden war, often exposing their ignorance of the far-flung region. For example, Representative Robert L. F. Sikes (D-FL), a foreign policy hawk, ranted that “Russia saw an opportunity and moved in lock, stock and barrel.”<sup>27</sup> He went on to advocate American assistance to Somalia, accusing Cyrus Vance’s people of incompetence, “Our State Department said in effect the United States cannot help a country engaged in war with a neighbouring state. This is another demonstration of State Department ineptness.”<sup>28</sup> While it was unlikely that the administration would take the tirades of Representative Sikes too seriously, his speech demonstrated the traction the issue was gaining. The Soviet intervention, at least in late 1977, probably did not change the mind of any member of Congress about SALT but it certainly gave fuel to the arguments of those already opposed to the talks.

The conflict also gained attention in the United States because of the curious role of Israeli assistance to Ethiopia. Israel and Ethiopia had a history of friendship as the two non-Muslim states in the region. However, Haile Selassie, along with most of Africa had broken relations with the Jewish state after the Arab-Israeli war in 1973. Despite that, Israelis had once again begun to train Ethiopian forces from 1975 onwards. Dan Connell reported in the *Washington Post* that Israel was providing spare parts for American made fighter jets as well as selling Soviet arms captured from Arab forces in 1973 to the Derg.<sup>29</sup> Once Congress caught wind of this, the administration had to justify its laissez-faire attitude towards the unusual alliance. Representative Lee Hamilton (D-IN) published in the Congressional Record his exchange of letters with Cyrus Vance over the

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<sup>27</sup> Robert L.F. Sikes. *Congressional Record*. 25 Oct. 1977. The U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Connell, Dan. “Israelis, Out of Favor in Africa, Still find Home in Ethiopia.” *The Washington Post*. 1 October 1977. in *Taking on the Superpowers*.

issue. Vance had written on 6 October that Israel may have sold arms to Ethiopia, but as long as they were not of American origin, the United States would not interfere.<sup>30</sup> (The administration had previously taken a position against third party transfers of US arms). There was plenty of confusion within the administration as to the policy toward Israel's role in the Horn. Deputy National Security Advisor, David Aaron, queried Paul Henze on the rumour that the State Department had requested that the Israelis just not share their activities or intelligence on the Horn. Henze could not verify the rumour, but certainly the National Security Council staff would not have approved of it.<sup>31</sup> In effect, Israel was assisting the same side of the conflict as was the Soviet Union, against the interests of the United States while at the same time the USSR was rendering assistance to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation against Israel.

The NSC staff actually hoped to curb Israeli involvement in order to use such a move as a gesture of goodwill toward the peace process in the Middle East. Bill Quandt, Brzezinski's Middle Eastern expert, had received advice that "any reduction in the Israeli role in support of Ethiopia could be turned to very good advantage by Sadat as tangible evidence that his policy toward Israel could benefit Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt."<sup>32</sup> Washington had every incentive to persuade Tel Aviv to stop aiding Addis Ababa in the war. At the same time, the Carter administration hoped to use its Middle Eastern allies to put pressure on the Soviets to also show restraint in their support for Ethiopia. The Middle East experts in the State Department proposed alerting Sadat to the Soviet airlift to Ethiopia and use of Egyptian airspace, anticipating a strong condemnation from Cairo.

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<sup>30</sup> The Hon Lee H. Hamilton. *Congressional Affairs*. 14 October, 1977.

<sup>31</sup> "Memorandum to Paul Henze from David Aaron, 11 November 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>32</sup> "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from William Quandt on Israeli Policy toward the Horn of Africa, 29 November 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

The Soviet experts, however, led by Marshall Shulman thought that such a move would be unduly provocative to Moscow.<sup>33</sup> Sadat, in any case, was already in his own process of clamping down on the Soviet presence in Cairo.

Ultimately, the administration delayed this decision, finally electing in late January to send a Presidential message to the heads of state of the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. Carter updated his Middle Eastern allies on the volume of Cuban troops that continued to arrive in Ethiopia and laid out the American position on the situation. First, the United States opposed aggression and believed in the inviolability of Ethiopia's borders. Second, he had encouraged Somalia to withdraw entirely from the Ogaden, and when that happened he would like to see a negotiated settlement between the two countries. Third, he supported negotiations with Eritrea that would see it remained part of Ethiopia. Finally, Carter hoped to send a special emissary to Addis Ababa to reassure Mengistu of international support for his country's territorial integrity, finishing with the hope that "if this could be done the Ethiopians would have no further need for Russians and Cubans."<sup>34</sup>

Washington also had to balance its response in relation to the international reaction and its other interests abroad. The Somali invasion was immediately condemned by the UN and the OAU, but the response to the Soviet and Cuban intervention was mixed. While an expanded Soviet and Cuban presence on the continent made many African leaders nervous, the communist countries had intervened on behalf of the victim,

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<sup>33</sup> See the attached State Department cables to "Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on publicizing the Soviet Airlift to Ethiopia, 8 December 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>34</sup> This whole paragraph is found in "Core of Presidential Message to Heads of State of Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt, 20 January 1978." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff*. JCPL.

which muted much of the potential criticism. China criticized the Soviet role and increased its ties with Somalia after Mogadishu broke with Moscow, but did not get as significantly involved as it had in Angola.<sup>35</sup> US allies in Europe condemned the invasion and the Soviet involvement and hoped for a quick settlement to the war, in part to safeguard their own interests in the Horn. West Germany and Britain were willing to consider defensive arms for Somalia if Siad Barre agreed to withdraw from Ethiopian territory. France, though, was worried about the conflict spilling into its former colony, Djibouti, and feared Somali designs on the newly independent state, which also had a number of ethnic Somalis. For the most part, those countries who were concerned about the conflict in the Horn and the Soviet involvement looked to the United States to take the lead, though few concrete suggestions materialized.<sup>36</sup>

For the Carter Administration, the issue of the conflict in the Horn was immediately one of Cold War implications and the Soviet-Cuban intervention only raised those stakes in the minds of American officials. That they also viewed the conflict as a Middle Eastern problem more than as an African problem was evident in the strategies they employed to put pressure on the Soviets to withdraw their military from the region. This is also a result, however, of the close traditional ties between Somalia and fellow Muslims in American-allied Middle Eastern states. The leaders of those states, alarmed at what they saw as growing Soviet-sponsored communism in the region, feared the possibility of such an ideology undermining their own regimes. As such, they made a louder appeal to the United States to counteract this trend. African leaders, on the other

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<sup>35</sup> The China factor increasingly comes into play in 1978, when Washington and Beijing moved toward formalizing diplomatic relations, in part, as a direct response to American frustration over the Soviet involvement in Ethiopia. This is discussed further in chapters IV and V.

<sup>36</sup> A meeting between delegates from the United States, Britain, France, West Germany and Italy is described later in this chapter.

hand, could not support Siad Barre, who had violated the most important tenet of their own rule, that of territorial integrity of the states of post-colonial Africa. Yet, few had much sympathy for the brutal rule of Mengistu either, so the OAU, aside from condemning the invasion, remained relatively quiet. Despite the taciturn attitude of most of Africa, the United States was receiving enough pressure internally and from the Middle East that it felt compelled to act.

### **American Negotiations with Ethiopia and Somalia**

While the United States remained concerned about the Soviet and Cuban involvement in the region, administration representatives continued to meet with both Somali and Ethiopian officials in December 1977 and January 1978 in an attempt to hammer out misunderstandings, and find some way to regain a measure of influence over the situation. However, the Soviet and Cuban assistance to Ethiopia was rapidly changing the events on the ground, making American efforts at guiding a settlement rather obsolete. Paul Henze recommended on several occasions to avoid further antagonising the Ethiopians, who after all, were the victims in the Ethiopian-Somali war. Due to its fears of totally offending its new Somali ally, the administration engaged in several missteps, which ultimately pleased no one. Still, these efforts on the part of the foreign policy team illustrate that Carter followed the approach favoured by the State Department during this period of rapid escalation of Soviet involvement in Ethiopia.

The United States was pleased with Siad Barre's expulsion of the Soviets from Somalia and wanted to send an encouraging message to Mogadishu without condoning the invasion of Ethiopia. Paul Henze organised a working group with representatives

from the State Department, Defense Department and CIA to discuss an appropriate response. Wary of putting too much in writing, the participants concluded that an oral communication from President Carter to President Siad Barre delivered by Ambassador Loughran would be the best way forward.<sup>37</sup> The language of the message, approved by the President, was so unfailingly polite that the administration, while paying lip service to encouraging Somalia to enter in negotiations to settle the conflict, ultimately conveyed a certain sympathy to Siad Barre and the “great complexity” of his situation.<sup>38</sup> While Carter certainly did not support the invasion, he did not strongly condemn it either.

Mogadishu sent a delegation to the Washington in early December, headed by Minister of Mines Dr. Hussein Abdulkadir Kassim, with a letter from Siad Barre to President Carter. The National Security Advisor met with the Somalis in a high level gesture to indicate American seriousness over establishing a friendship between the two nations. Brzezinski felt, though, that there was nothing new in the Somali outreach since the delegation continued to justify the invasion of the Ogaden and play the Soviet card. Mogadishu clearly knew how to play upon American cold war insecurities as it expressed fear not just over a Soviet encouragement of an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, but also over a master plan of the Kremlin to gain dominance over Africa.<sup>39</sup> Though Brzezinski could see through this manipulation, he was willing to at least keep dialogue with Siad Barre open, in part because he believed this Soviet motivation to be true.

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<sup>37</sup>“Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on Conflict in the Horn – Letter to Siad?, 14 November 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>38</sup> “Message from President Carter to President Siad to be Delivered Orally by Ambassador Loughran, 14 November 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>39</sup> “Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski on Meeting with Somali Delegation and Letter from President Siad to You, 8 December 1977.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

At this point, the administration felt that it had mostly taken the right steps in its approach to the crisis in the Horn. Henze, in his NSC Annual Report, acknowledged that the only mistake the US government had made was not having properly anticipated Somali intentions and therefore strongly conveyed that American willingness to consider military assistance was contingent upon *not* invading Ethiopia. Overall though, he believed that the administration's "timely actions in respect to the Horn have enabled us to stay out of the fray."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, he contrasted the American position with that of the USSR.

The Soviets, meanwhile, have found themselves blamed by world and African opinion for having fomented the Somali-Ethiopian clash and can find no alternative but to bolster Mengistu's unpopular regime. No matter how the Ogaden fight comes out, the Eritrean problem remains—thus the Soviets are potentially caught in a Vietnam situation of major proportions.<sup>41</sup>

His assessment was rather optimistic and didn't really reflect the nervousness of the whole US government over the possibility that the Soviets might be as successful in Ethiopia as they had been in Angola.

On 12 January, 1978, President Carter fielded a question on the Horn of Africa at a regular press conference. In what the administration perceived as a measured and balanced response, he called for Somalia to initiate negotiations to end the conflict. Apparently, however, Mengistu saw the response as woefully inadequate. Carter had failed to mention Ethiopia's territorial integrity or that Somalia was at fault for the war. Henze believed that Addis Ababa had a good case for anger, though he attributed it to the

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<sup>40</sup> "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on Submission for NSC Annual Report, 9 December 1977." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviets having “capitalized on Ethiopian sensitivities to use the statement against us.”<sup>42</sup>

To counteract this misperception, the administration agreed that Brzezinski should acquiesce to a request for a meeting by the new Ethiopian ambassador Ayalew Mandefro, a native of the town of Harar in the disputed Ogaden. During the meeting, the National Security Advisor delivered an oral message from President Carter to Chairman Mengistu in which he clearly spelled out the American support for Ethiopia’s borders, as well as a call for complete Somali withdrawal from the country. More controversially, at least within the Derg, he also espoused a cease-fire in Eritrea, a measure unlikely to be accepted by Mengistu.<sup>43</sup>

According to Brzezinski, Ambassador Ayalew was impressed with the President’s message. He emphasised, however, that the administration needed to stop “whispering” its condemnation of Somalia.<sup>44</sup> Ayalew was a relative moderate within the regime and encouraged the United States to appeal to Mengistu’s innate nationalism to counter his ideological affinity for the Soviets.<sup>45</sup> Then, rather alarmingly, the Ethiopian representative expressed fear at returning to Addis Ababa, recounting an attempt on his life before leaving for Washington.<sup>46</sup> This was part of a pattern that the administration faced in Ethiopia. The United States would hear from moderates within Ethiopia that

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<sup>42</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on The President and the Horn of Africa, 16 January 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>43</sup> “Text of Oral Message from President Carter to Chairman Mengistu, 19 January 1978,” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>44</sup> “Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski on his meeting with Ethiopian Ambassador, 19 January 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>45</sup> In *the Global Cold War*, Odd Arne Westad cited Soviet documents in which Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia Ratanov called Mandefro a “right-wing” element and enemy of Mengistu, p 274.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

there were still those sympathetic to its former ally within Addis Ababa, but soon afterwards Mengistu had them killed or they defected.<sup>47</sup>

At the end of January, the State Department organized a 5-power summit to deal with the situation in the Horn. Representatives of the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, France and Italy met in Washington on 21 January 1978 to coordinate a western response to the conflict and the Soviet and Cuban intervention. The participants came to the expected conclusions that they would call for a Somali withdrawal from Ethiopia, a negotiated settlement by which the Ogaden would gain some autonomy but remain federated with Ethiopia and consider UN troops to enter the region in a peace-keeping capacity.<sup>48</sup> The most perceptive part of the discussion came from the French representative who got to the crux of the Cold War implications of the conflict.

The problem of the Horn was primarily a geopolitical one – Soviet penetration of an area of importance to the West and to the Arab world from which the Soviets have been almost entirely excluded. Soviet military supplies are being furnished Ethiopia in amounts in excess of what would be needed for the Ogaden War, and will serve Soviet strategic advantage in consolidating a position first in an Ethiopia where the old elites—the westernized intellectuals, the clergy, and the bourgeoisie—have been dispossessed, later in destabilising Kenya following the death of Kenyatta, and even regaining a position in Somalia where many Soviet-formed cadre in the military must be assumed to be ready to take power if the opportunity arises.<sup>49</sup>

Then, he got to the heart of the problem of the geopolitical reality of the world: “the solution to the Ogaden conflict, if one could indeed be found, would not solve the

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<sup>47</sup> Ambassador Ayalew defected to the United States by the end of January 1978.

<sup>48</sup> “Cable from the Secretary of State to the American embassies in Bonn, London, Lagos, Mogadishu, Paris, and Rome, 24 January 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

problem of the Horn from the Western and moderate Arab point of view.”<sup>50</sup> Even France, who did not often see eye to eye with the United States, approached this regional spat through the prism of east-west relations. Finally, and significantly for détente, the American representative agreed then to raise the issue with the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that this initiative came from within the State Department, the wing of the US government most supportive of détente. However, the idea was to draw the Soviets into negotiations, knowing that Moscow had the upper hand in the Horn.

These efforts on the part of the State Department met with disdain from Paul Henze. He expressed frustration at what he saw as several missing elements of the discussion, mainly that there was no mention of Cuba, nor of the Eritrean insurgency. Moreover, despite acknowledging that the problem was Soviet involvement, the participants did not attempt to seek a solution that would see Moscow’s withdrawal from Ethiopia. In a telling statement with which Brzezinski would have agreed, the NSC staffer bemoaned that, “State seems lusting to draw the Soviets into discussion of the Horn, just as they earlier rushed to invite the Soviets into the Egyptian-Israeli talks.”<sup>52</sup> This exposed the fundamental difference between the approaches of Carter’s NSC staff and State Department. Both wanted the Soviets out of the Horn. Both favoured approaching the Soviets in bilateral discussions. However, the State Department hoped to use détente to involve the Soviets into the international process to pursue peace. Brzezinski’s staff, on the other hand, wished to use détente to tell the Soviets that they couldn’t do whatever they wanted without repercussions.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on State’s 5-Power Horn Meeting, 24 January 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

## **Going Public on the Horn**

During the second half of 1977, the conflict in the Horn also infected Soviet-American bilateral relations, putting stress on an already tenuous beginning to the Carter-Brezhnev relationship. For the superpowers, the conflict in the Horn was always a Cold War conflict. While location and ideology may have played their roles, the importance of the zero-sum competition between the United States and Soviet Union can not be over-emphasised. The powers did not get involved because of oil or economics. Even the supposed shared ideology between the Soviet Union and the Socialist dictators in Ethiopia and Somalia was tenuous as the fickle brutality of the Horns' leaders tended to undermine their relations with the USSR. Additionally for Carter, the role of Cuba in the conflict compromised his ability to get domestic approval for his Latin American initiatives. The President had succeeded in signing the Panama Canal Treaties in September but he was under attack from conservatives who thought he was giving away a necessary strategic asset to an anti-American regime. Carter was already facing a difficult fight in the Senate for ratification when yet another Cuban intervention in Africa complicated matters. The administration had signed over the canal and relaxed its sanctions against Cuba in the same period of time. In the eyes of his conservative critics, Carter was visibly weakening the geo-strategic position of the United States particularly in its own backyard, while Cuba, that constant thorn in the White House's side, was showing its muscle in Africa. For political survival, the President needed to combat this image of weakness, and Brzezinski recommended the Horn as the issue on which to do it.

At the start of this period, official American policy still treated the issue as outside the realm of superpower relations, the course recommended by Vance and the State Department. The President gave a speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 4 October to promote nuclear disarmament and restraint on the part of world powers on internationalising local conflicts. Initial drafts of the speech included a section on the conflict in the Horn, highlighting the Soviet involvement as it “aids and abets the open warfare now taking place.”<sup>53</sup> Brzezinski’s staff approved the mention of Soviet involvement in the Horn. Yet, it did not appear in the speech that Carter actually delivered. Instead, the President merely encouraged military restraint in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>54</sup> Though there is not available documentation on the State Department’s part in finalising the speech, the decision to play down the Soviet role was a clear indication that Vance was still winning the argument over American policy toward the Horn.

In the following month, though, the President increasingly began to call attention to the Soviet and Cuban roles in Ethiopia in his public appearances. As previously indicated, by November, the CIA was aware of the massive amount of arms shipments Moscow was sending to Addis Ababa and the presence of Cuban troops in the region, elevating American frustration with the other superpower but also with the United States’ communist neighbour. Carter first broached the subject of Cuba himself in remarks to a group of editors and news directors on 11 November 1977.

We've got additional problems, as you know, in the Horn of Africa, also in Angola, which still has about 20,000 troops. The Cubans have, in effect, taken on the colonial aspect

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<sup>53</sup> “President’s UN speech draft, 27 September 1977” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>54</sup> Carter, Jimmy. “United Nations Address before the General Assembly, 4 Oct. 1977.” The American Presidency Project Online. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>

that the Portuguese gave up in months gone by. And we hope that there will be some inclination on the part of the Cubans to withdraw their forces from Angola. They are now spreading into other countries in Africa, like Mozambique. Recently, they are building up their so-called advisors in Ethiopia. We consider this to be a threat to the permanent peace in Africa.<sup>55</sup>

The language he used was fairly aggressive, cleverly comparing the Cuban presence in Angola with that of the colonial rule of Portugal. A week after these remarks, Brzezinski, in his weekly NSC report to the President, advised that he needed to take some tough stances on positions on which he was seen as weak. Cuba was one of those areas. The President agreed and had noted that his public pressure on the Cuban role in Africa had taken too long, lamenting that “it took me 6 months to get it done.”<sup>56</sup> Not only was the President’s National Security Advisor counselling toughness, but the post-election grace period was over and the public who had elected him to take American foreign policy in a new direction was also sensing weakness on Carter’s part.

In this climate, the Soviet involvement in the Horn began to occupy more and more of the administration’s thoughts on superpower relations. Brzezinski encouraged American officials to raise their concerns over the matter in talks with their Soviet counterparts. In his memoirs, he recalled urging the President to direct US Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, to make a speech to the body condemning the Soviet-Cuban presence in Ethiopia.<sup>57</sup> He then brought the issue up himself in a dinner with Anatoly Dobrynin, in which he claimed that the Soviet Ambassador encouraged him to convince the President to write Brezhnev, raising those issues the United States felt were important

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<sup>55</sup>“ Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Editors and News Directors, 11 November 1977.” *The American Presidency Project Online*.

<sup>56</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, Annex II #37, p. 560.

<sup>57</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p. 179.

with regard to SALT.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the subject finally reached the highest level of government, when, at Brzezinski's urging, President Carter referred to the American displeasure in a letter to Brezhnev on 21 December 1977.

I would also hope that the United States and the Soviet Union could collaborate in making certain that regional African disputes do not escalate into major international conflicts. The fighting that has developed between Ethiopia and Somalia is a regrettable development, one which should be contained and terminated before it spreads further. We are encouraging the parties to accept mediation, we are refraining from the export of arms to any of the parties involved in the struggle, and we are urging the other African states to take an active role in the early resolution of the conflict. We hope very much that you will adopt a similar position, and we would be glad to work closely with you to attain these goals.<sup>59</sup>

Though it was highly unlikely that the Soviet Union could give the United States the desired response while the state of the Horn was in such flux, Brzezinski felt that the holes in détente needed to be exposed and from his point of view, this was a glaring one. This letter represented the first time the United States suggested that the two superpowers work together to bring about an end to the conflict. However, it took place when the Soviets clearly had the upper hand, giving the appearance to the USSR of desperation on Carter's part.<sup>60</sup> Without the option of mutual mediation, the President searched for another way of influencing the situation.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Carter's Letter to Brezhnev, 21 December 1977." Brzezinski Documents. *The Carter-Brezhnev Collection*. NSA.

<sup>60</sup> Oleg Troyanovsky, Soviet Ambassador to the UN, recalled Andrew Young, American Ambassador to the UN, approaching him about raising the issue of stopping the war in the Horn with the Security Council. Troyanovsky claims to have responded that "while the Somalis were advancing, you did not do anything, and now that they are retreating, you want to raise the question in the Security Council." Transcripts of conference #3 of the Carter-Brezhnev Project, p. 13.

By January 1978, the administration was clearly publicly insinuating the crisis in the Horn and Soviet involvement there into bilateral relations. This, not coincidentally, occurred as Soviet and Cuban backed Ethiopia began to beat back the Somali invasion. Despite repeated assurances to the contrary, the United States feared that they would in turn march over the border into Somalia. Not seeing any alternatives, the administration entered a war of words with the other superpower. In the previously mentioned 12 January press conference, Carter put responsibility for the crisis on the Horn squarely on Moscow's shoulders.

They, in effect, contributed to the war that's presently taking place between Somalia and Ethiopia. They sold excessive quantities of arms and weapons both to Somalia and to Ethiopia. The war began using Soviet weapons, and now they are shipping large quantities of weapons, some men, and they are also dispatching Cubans into Ethiopia, perhaps to become combatants themselves. We have expressed our concern to the Soviets in very strong terms.<sup>61</sup>

Though the United States was not yet linking Soviet behaviour in the Horn to other aspects of bilateral relations, there was a discernable shift during these months from dealing with the issue through letter writing and diplomatic back channels to voicing the American concern in a public.

This shift was obvious, not just through tracing Carter's public speeches, but also within the conversations of the NSC staff. On 16 January, Henze acknowledged that "much as we want the Soviets out, we are not going to get them out soon."<sup>62</sup> The only two ways he supposed the Soviets might leave are out of "exhaustion and frustration, as

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<sup>61</sup> "The President's News Conference of 12 January 1978." *The American Presidency Project Online*.

<sup>62</sup> "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on Fundamentals in the Horn of Africa Situation, 16 January 1978." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL. Underline in original.

we did in Vietnam, or because the Ethiopians kick them out.”<sup>63</sup> His remedy was to “make their stay as costly as possible and the source of fundamental strain for them.”<sup>64</sup> In advice that Brzezinski heeded, though he would ultimately take it even further, Henze recommended that the United States continually remind Africa and the world that the Soviets were the guilty party in the Horn.<sup>65</sup> In more specific terms, Henze advocated appealing to Moscow to cease the arms flow to Addis Ababa to stop the war. As a second measure, the United States should “appeal/threat” that “we will retaliate in many other ways and places of importance to them if they persist in fuelling conflict in the Horn.”<sup>66</sup>

At least the first part of Henze’s recommendation became official policy and the administration now considered the issue so important that it was included into the grandest and most widely publicised speech of all. The President, in his first State of the Union Address, once again forcibly accused the Soviets and Cubans of responsibility for the conflict in the Horn of Africa. Inclusion of the issue in the State of Union, an address that focussed not just on foreign policy but on all of the significant matters facing the United States, indicated the seriousness that the administration placed on it.

Arms supplied by the Soviet Union now fuel both sides of a conflict in the Horn of Africa between Somalia and Ethiopia. There is a danger that the Soviet Union and Cuba will commit their own soldiers in this conflict, transforming it from a local war to a confrontation with broader strategic implications.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze on A Strategy for a Dynamic Approach to the Horn, 17 January 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 1, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

We deplore the fact that disagreements in this region have grown—with the assistance of outside powers—into bloody conflict. We have made clear to both sides that we will supply no arms for aggressive purposes. We will not recognize forcible changes in boundaries. We want to see the fighting end and the parties move from the battlefield to the negotiating table.<sup>67</sup>

The speech represented far stronger rhetoric than the more polite language Carter had used in his letter to Brezhnev. The administration did not really expect negotiations at this point, but taking the high road was a diplomatic move and a nod to the State Department. However, this strong public stance was a not so subtle indicator that the quiet diplomatic approach to setting some rules to the game of détente was shifting to a more blatant form of confrontation. While the President's instincts still led him to favour Vance's methods, Brzezinski's influence was making inroads.

## **Conclusion**

The second six months of 1977 witnessed momentous changes on the ground in the Horn of Africa. Somalia was quite successful in its initial attack on the Ogaden and Ethiopia was on the run in Eritrea as well. A collapse of the Mengistu regime appeared imminent. However, the Soviet Union, Cuba and South Yemen all came to the aid of the struggling Marxist state and their presence immediately helped slow the Somali advances. Moscow attempted to maintain ties with both sides of the conflict, though it reduced its weapons shipments to Mogadishu while increasing them to Addis Ababa. Siad Barre, feeling betrayed by the Soviet interest in Ethiopia and frustrated at the reduction in arms from their socialist brethren, gambled on American patronage and kicked the Soviets out of

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<sup>67</sup> "The State of the Union Annual Message to the Congress, 19 January 1978." *The American Presidency Project Online*.

Somalia. The USSR, now freed from its obligation to Somalia, was then able to make a huge commitment of support—militarily, ideologically and diplomatically—to Ethiopia.

The United States received pressure from many directions to respond. First, the Carter administration had to deal with the perception that it had encouraged the Somali invasion. However, it fumbled again by not loudly condemning Siad Barre's action. American allies in the region and right wing politicians were clamouring for American assistance for Somalia, a theme that got louder after the Soviet intervention. The United States was essentially caught between Cold War considerations and moral considerations. Instead of choosing one or the other, it hedged between the two. When the President attempted to get regional allies to step up and help Somalia instead, they agreed in principle but were hesitant to make it a reality. So, the administration met with representatives of Ethiopia and Somalia, requesting both parties to consider a cease-fire and mediation of a settlement, but its efforts were half-hearted at best, due in part to the feeling that the United States had little leverage with either state at this point.

This large scale Soviet and Cuban military assistance to Ethiopia, particularly as it followed the large scale and successful intervention in Angola, caused considerable alarm in the United States. For Americans, what was détente about if it wasn't about establishing some rules for the competition between them and the Soviets? To hard-liners, it appeared that the USSR was not playing by any such rules. For Brzezinski, the Soviet Union was not following his rule of *reciprocity*; if Washington showed restraint, then so too should Moscow. (This, of course, did not apply when Moscow showed restraint). On the other hand, Vance and the State Department did not define détente so narrowly and though they thought the Soviet intervention was detrimental to the region

and to relations with the United States, they still hoped to keep the conflict out of the realm of superpower talks. As of yet, however, neither the National Security Council staff nor the State Department had found anything that could be used as leverage against Soviet behaviour.

These six months also saw a subtle but noticeable shift in the way the United States dealt with the Soviet Union. At the start, as was his natural inclination, the President sided with the State Department. He had wanted to improve relations with the USSR and move beyond Cold War thinking. He did not want to prop up dictators with dreadful human rights records, just because they antagonised the Soviet Union. However, the Cold War zero-sum-game so permeated American thinking that the administration failed to condemn Siad Barre and the invasion of the Ogaden. It also prevented the United States from reaching out to the USSR and propose that they work together to stop the conflict. The Cold War mentality was effectively already there. Brzezinski, in his daily meetings with the President, merely needed to hammer home his point that the Soviets were cheating at détente. With his influence, the President moved from vague platitudes of mutual restraint to blatant accusations of the Soviet Union deliberately fuelling tensions in the Third World. The aforementioned shift, though discernable, was still a policy in flux and mainly centred on the conflict in the Horn. During the next six months, Vance and Brzezinski would go head to head, using this issue in attempt to dictate the American position on détente, and affect the way President Carter would respond to future crises.

## Chapter IV “Where the Two of Us Part”

The history of American foreign policy includes a long list of debates on how the United States should intervene abroad. Friends and enemies have changed, but at heart of many of these arguments were differing concepts of what a “moral” foreign policy should look like. The Cyrus Vance-Zbigniew Brzezinski argument about Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa in the 1970’s was one of those debates, the ramifications of which affected the outcome of the Cold War. One man advocated diplomacy and the inclusion of the international community to further the cause of peace while the other promoted confrontation with the hope of a long-term victory. They presented a choice between international peace and international justice.

I did not believe that Soviet actions in Africa were part of a grand Soviet plan, but rather attempts to exploit targets of opportunity. –Cyrus Vance<sup>1</sup>

[I]n my view the situation between the Ethiopians and the Somalis was more than a border conflict. Coupled with the expansion of Soviet influence and military presence to South Yemen, it posed a potentially grave threat to our position in the Middle East, notably in the Arabian Peninsula. It represented a serious setback in our attempts to develop with the Soviets some rules of the game in dealing with turbulence in the Third World. The Soviets had earlier succeeded in sustaining, through the Cubans, their preferred solution in Angola, and they now seemed embarked on a repetition in a region in close proximity to our most sensitive interests. –Zbigniew Brzezinski<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p. 178.

Of all the troubled areas that the Carter Administration confronted in its four years, the infamous ideological disagreement between Vance and Brzezinski played itself out most vividly over Soviet involvement in the Horn of Africa, a seemingly peripheral conflict far from the traditional Cold War hotspots. Vance's preference for reducing tensions with the Soviets and Brzezinski's desire for ideological confrontation with Moscow clashed more strongly over the Horn than any other foreign policy issue. As Vance recalled, "these differences, though sharp at times, were containable at the cost of not having a truly coherent policy."<sup>3</sup> Brzezinski also lamented, "I thought in some ways, my disagreement with him [Vance] was in some ways healthy and good for the President, but in fact, it clearly wasn't because the public image of the split, which has grown subsequently over the years was politically damaging."<sup>4</sup> In his memoirs, Brzezinski remembered that this happened, "first, over the issue of the Soviet-Cuban role in the African Horn and the likely impact of that on SALT; then came the China question; and in the final year and a half we differed on how to respond to the Iranian crisis."<sup>5</sup> It was the Soviet intervention in the Horn that would mark a defining moment in President Carter's approach to foreign policy. Brzezinski and Vance represented two schools of thought that were at the heart of the debate as to how the United States should conduct itself abroad. Their personalities, the administration's perception of Soviet motives, American ideology, and public opinion all influenced Carter's shift from Vance's principles to those of Brzezinski.

During the first half of 1978, Vance and Brzezinski, behind the closed doors of several SCC meetings, sparred over the American response to the Soviet intervention in

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<sup>3</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> Author's interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 38.

the Horn. The combative exchanges between the two men during these meetings demonstrated the importance of the conflict to the making of American foreign policy during this period. There was a debate for the future course of the United States' role in the world. Brzezinski advocated confronting the enemy, because he felt it was wrong to compromise with what he saw as an immoral system. Vance, on the other hand, believed that the United States had an obligation to find areas of mutual concern with the Soviet Union so they could work together to further the goal of world peace. Furthermore, he did not believe in confrontation for the sake of itself, especially when the United States probably could not win it. The spring of 1978 was particularly important because both détente and the administration's over-riding policy were still in flux. During these contentious meetings, Vance's preferred solutions usually became policy. However, Brzezinski made his feelings public and on the key area of linkage, persuaded the President to mimic his rhetoric. By the summer, détente was more strained than ever (though SALT negotiations and other aspects of détente would continue until the invasion of Afghanistan) and Brzezinski was holding more sway with the President. This chapter traces the public pressure, debates within the administration, and the development of the public face of this policy that moved Carter from a leader who advocated détente to one who was willing to risk it all over Soviet involvement in a border conflict in Africa.

### **Public Opinion and Perception**

Early in the year, the regional diplomatic approach, favoured by Secretary Vance, held sway at the SCC meetings. After a meeting on 26 January, President Carter sent letters to several members of the non-aligned movement, including the leaders of Yugoslavia,

Nigeria, Venezuela, and India to warn the Soviets and Cubans that their actions in the Horn were causing negative reactions in the Third World.<sup>6</sup> Though inclusion of the issue in the President's State of the Union address had probably rendered this last point moot, the participants also decided that they would prefer to avoid unnecessary publicity relating to the American response to the crisis.

The press, however, was not entirely cooperative, as February witnessed a series of articles on the Horn in major newspapers and magazines, much of it critical of the administration's hands-off policy. The *Washington Post* reported on the Ethiopian/Cuban counteroffensive into the Ogaden and Israel's policy to continue to supply arms to Soviet-backed Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> *Newsweek* published an interview with Somali President Siad Barre, where he touted the "grand design" of the USSR's approach to the Red Sea Region.<sup>8</sup> That same week, the magazine discussed the theory that "the ultimate objective of the Soviet 'grand design' was to outflank NATO by denying African raw materials—and Arab oil—to the West."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, members of Congress were joining the discussion. On 8 February, Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri spoke on the Senate floor on the need for a stronger American response to the crisis, recommending that the United States revoke a prior arms sale to Ethiopia and immediately begin supplying Somalia with arms. The Senator also noted his prior opposition to American involvement in Angola, believing the situations were entirely different.<sup>10</sup> In the House of Representatives, conservative Congressman Edward

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<sup>6</sup>"Summary of Conclusions, SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, 26 January 1978." Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28. *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>7</sup>Jay Ross. "Ethiopia begins Ogaden Drive; Somalis Retreat." *Washington Post*. 7 February 1978.

<sup>8</sup>"Russia's 'Grand Design'" *Newsweek*. 13 February 1978.

<sup>9</sup>"War in the Horn" *Newsweek*. 13 February 1978.

<sup>10</sup>Sen. Thomas Eagleton. *Congressional Record*. 8 February 1978.

Derwinski (R-IL) accused the Administration of “hoping [the problem in the Horn] would merely go away.”<sup>11</sup> He referred to a *Chicago Tribune* article that concluded, “Somebody has got to lead the free world, helping nations defend themselves against calculated Soviet advances. If it isn’t Carter, who will it be?”<sup>12</sup>

On the left, Paul Tsongas (D-MA), who along with Congressman Don Bonker (D-WA) visited the Horn as part of a Congressional Delegation in December, addressed the House of Representatives in mid-February. He urged the President to end American neutrality and openly condemn the Somali invasion, calling on them to withdraw immediately, while warning Ethiopia not to cross the border into Somalia. Further, he called for the introduction of a UN resolution on a moratorium on arms shipments to the region. Rep. Tsongas then suggested a UN peace-keeping force along the Ethiopian-Somali border.<sup>13</sup> He did not mention the fact that the Soviet Union would surely have vetoed any such UN resolutions. The effect of this public pressure was not negligible as it encouraged the hardening of positions into two main camps among administration officials, soon evidenced in passionate disagreements in the SCC meetings.

At the end of February, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles analysing the Carter administration’s policy in the Horn. The reports ranged from sympathetic to highly critical of the administration. In an article by James Reston, on 26 February, the columnist (a Washington insider) detailed the policy reappraisals of the administration toward China and the Soviet Union, including the ideas of technology transfers to China and consultations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran. He reported Washington’s struggle

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<sup>11</sup> The Hon. Edward Derwinski. *Congressional Record*. 14 February 1978.

<sup>12</sup> “A Wild Gamble for the Horn” *Chicago Tribune*. 9 February 1978. Found in *Congressional Record*, 14 February, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> The Hon Paul Tsongas. *Congressional Record*. 15 February 1978.

to understand the game the Soviets were playing, and proposed two main theories. First (echoing Brzezinski's argument), it seemed the Soviets wanted to have it all, agreement on the big issues of arms control and trade while still maintaining the freedom to act as they please in the Third World. The second theory speculated that a weakened Brezhnev was unable to insist upon a cohesive strategy, that the military and political wings of the Party were acting out of sync with each other. In a plug for the administration, the reporter concluded that "[i]t is the United States that is taking the lead and trying to compose the differences in the Middle East, in Rhodesia, in the Horn of Africa, and in South Africa."<sup>14</sup>

In another article on the same day, Craig Whitney of the *New York Times* argued that the Soviets were acting on ideological aspiration rather than on any grand strategy.

Leonid I. Brezhnev and his colleagues are probably tired of hearing themselves described as stodgy patrons of the status quo... [C]oming to the aid of Ethiopia restored, as the Angolan intervention did, the legitimacy of their claim to lead the Marxist vanguard of the "forces of history." The cost of intervention is considered a sort of ideological dues.<sup>15</sup>

Whitney also raised the possibility of the Soviets and Cubans entering the fray in Rhodesia once their services were not needed as much in Ethiopia.<sup>16</sup> Instead of furthering the grand strategy argument, the United States was beginning to understand that the Soviets hoped to inspire Third World revolutionaries and demonstrate their support. Therefore, the Soviets did not necessarily get to choose where their involvement might lay. Instead, the circumstances would dictate their participation. Thus, within the press, the administration and Congress, there was a general agreement as to Soviet

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<sup>14</sup> Reston, James. "Carter and the Communists." *The New York Times*, 26 February 1978.

<sup>15</sup> Whitney, Craig. "Russia Re-enters Africa from Ground Up." *The New York Times*, 26 February 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

motives in the Horn. The disagreements occurred in assessing the importance of the Horn and subsequently the remedy for dealing with the problem. In another *New York Times* article on 27 February, Tad Szulc criticized the Carter administration for not realising the potential for Soviet and Cuban involvement earlier. (The National Security Council documents make it clear that members of the administration were very aware of this potential the previous year though they did not appreciate the sheer scale at which it could happen). Still, Szulc insisted that “[h]aving underestimated the Soviet-Cuban policy for nearly a year, the Carter administration is now wholly at a loss as to what Moscow and Havana propose to do next.”<sup>17</sup> He was missing the point. The administration just didn’t know what *the United States* was going to do next. The unfortunate lesson the US government was learning was that détente (in the American idea) wasn’t working. In response, Brzezinski wanted to prove that it wasn’t working and Vance searched for a way to make it work.

One of the most vocal critics of Carter’s foreign policy and handling of the crisis in the Horn, was, of course, Ronald Reagan. The future President, after a surprisingly strong showing in the Republic primaries of 1976, was making a name for himself as a fierce opponent of détente, in anticipation of another run for the presidency. In a 17 March 1978 speech, Reagan railed against what he saw as the complacency of the Carter administration in its dealings with the Soviets over the Horn.

Today, we can see the brunt of the Soviet Union's capabilities at work in the Horn of Africa. [] The Soviet goal is obvious: to secure a permanent foothold for itself on the Red Sea. If the Soviets are successful -- and it looks more and more as if they will be -- then the entire Horn of Africa will be under their influence, if not their control.

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<sup>17</sup> Szulc, Tad. “Soviet Master Plan in East Africa: The Horn of our Dilemma.” *The New York Times*, 27 February 1978.

From there, they can threaten the sea lanes carrying oil to western Europe and the United States, if and when they choose. More immediately, control of the Horn of Africa would give Moscow the ability to destabilize those governments on the Arabian peninsula which have proven themselves strongly anti-communist. Among them are some of the world's principal oil exporters. Moscow can also turn its full attention south if it can ensure its position in the Horn of Africa. It takes no great stretch of the imagination to see that Rhodesia is a tempting target. Cuban leaders now boast that it is.<sup>18</sup>

Though, in retrospect, this sounds overly dramatic, such pressure affected public opinion, emphasising for many Carter's "weak" response. Certainly during this period, public support for a new SALT agreement fell slightly, though the impact of the Horn is hard to assess.<sup>19</sup> In any case, it was easier for Brzezinski to argue that the President needed to rebut this image.

With its decision to publicise the Soviet presence in Ethiopia, the administration had opened Pandora's box. Essentially, Carter had created a situation he could not control. He found himself besieged by both the left and the right. The former advocated using the UN to handle the situation, ignoring the probability of a Soviet veto in the Security Council. The latter blamed the administration for not anticipating the problem earlier and continuing to pander to Moscow on SALT while using the intervention as proof that the Soviet Union was embarked on a systematic communist takeover of Africa. All of this criticism was giving Carter a reputation of weakness with the American people. When his advisors decided to reverse their earlier decision and de-emphasise the

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<sup>18</sup> Reagan, Ronald. "America's Purpose in the World, 17 March 1978." *The Reagan Legacy Online*.

<sup>19</sup> An NBC/AP poll asked Americans the question, "Do you favor or oppose a new agreement between the United States and Russia which would limit nuclear weapons?" In January 1978, 74% were in favour with 19% opposed and 7% not sure, while in June 1978, 67% favoured with 22% opposed and 11% not sure. The poll can be found in Tom W. Smith "The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism." p. 287.

Horn as a foreign policy problem, it was already too late. The press, Congress, and his future political opponent had latched onto the issue and kept it in the news. When Brzezinski argued that the Soviet intervention in the Horn was affecting public opinion in the United States toward other superpower issues, he was right, but it had been a dilemma of the administration's own making.

### **Personality and Ideology**

Beltway insiders had known of the potentially conflicting personalities and ideologies of Vance and Brzezinski when Carter had tapped them for service. Thus far, however, they had largely agreed on the necessity of the Panama Canal Treaties, the importance of human rights to the administration's overall foreign policy, the approach to Middle East peace talks, and SALT. Their attitudes toward establishing official relations with China had slightly diverged, but the issue had not yet reached its peak. The much anticipated disintegration of their relationship became readily apparent to all in the spring of 1978 and the Soviet intervention in the Horn was what brought it to the foreground.

Brzezinski's desire to act forcefully and stare down the Soviet Union contrasted greatly with Vance's resignation that this was not an issue on which they could beat Moscow, that the best they could hope for was to help end the conflict quickly.

American perceptions of Soviet motivation in the Horn were summed up effectively in a cable to Secretary Vance from the American embassy in Moscow in early February. Essentially, embassy officials thought that there was little chance of American participation in any efforts to bring about a peaceful solution. They stressed that the only potentially effective way to apply pressure on the Soviets was by focusing on bilateral issues. However, they argued that "the Soviets are inclined to discount or ignore general

warnings or blandishments when they feel immediate, concrete gains are in their grasp.”<sup>20</sup>

While the authors acknowledged that withholding cooperation on lesser issues would have little effect and focusing on larger issues could be as damaging to the United States as to the USSR, they were equally adamant that Washington change the rules of the game in Africa.

The Soviets are still playing a “zero-sum” game, and they have as yet shown little indication of a recognition that it would be to their long-range interest to reduce superpower involvement in the African continent. One of our goals should be to deal with the situation in the Horn in such a manner that the outcome will facilitate understanding of this fundamental concept.<sup>21</sup>

Therein lay the problem for American foreign policy makers. Carter, despite his attempt to rethink American foreign policy, never abandoned the concept of containment. That the Soviets would continue to attempt to expand its influence in Africa was an entirely realistic assessment. Direct American military intervention in the immediate post-Vietnam era was not an option. Diplomacy and minor inducements were deemed ineffective. Covert operations were undermined by the Church commission. The choice was then to either abandon three decades of containment policy or to find some leverage from the cooperation within the détente framework. SALT, though also important to the United States, was the logical choice for the latter. To the detriment of superpower détente, President Carter ultimately chose containment over SALT.

In February, the SCC decided to send David Aaron, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, to Ethiopia to meet with Mengistu. The United States still hoped to maintain some ties in Addis Ababa, as a thorn in Moscow’s side as

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<sup>20</sup> “Cable from the American Embassy in Moscow to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

well as to ease any future cooperation. He reviewed this mission for the SCC on 22 February. Tensions flared in the meeting particularly relating to the possibility of sending a carrier task force to the region. Dr. Brzezinski continually promoted a hard-line with the Soviets, wanting to show support for Somalia. He either did not realise or did not care that he was advocating a position that completely disregarded Carter's promise to stop supporting the bad guys just because they opposed the Soviet Union. Secretary Vance, on the other hand, focussed on the conflict itself and wanted to take a hard-line against Somalia, the conflict's aggressor. Secretary Brown found himself siding with one or the other on various issues. The tension was palpable throughout the meeting. Dr. Brzezinski dominated the discussion and Secretary Vance's frustration with its direction was evident.

Vance promoted the idea of using the OAU, and failing that the UN, to pressure Somalia to withdraw from Ethiopian territory. While no one objected to this, Brzezinski felt that a stronger response was required. He promoted the idea of sending a US Carrier Task Force to the region. Secretary Vance objected quite strongly. Secretary Brown allowed that a task force might deter the Ethiopians from crossing into Somalia.<sup>22</sup> However, if Ethiopia crossed into Somali territory without response from the task force, then it would have not only failed but also would undermine the credibility of such task forces in the future. While the National Security Advisor was willing to use the task force if Ethiopia invaded Somalia, none of the other participants were willing to risk it. Brzezinski, in his memoirs, pointed to this occasion as the moment at which the United States lost its opportunity to take a hard-line, emboldening the Soviets, and leading to the

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<sup>22</sup> The U.S. had intelligence that there was joint Soviet-Ethiopian military planning that involved crossing into Somali territory if Somalia did not withdraw from the Ogaden. "Memorandum from Cyrus Vance to the President." *Vance Papers. The Carter-Brezhnev Project.* NSA.

chain of events that brought down SALT.<sup>23</sup> In retrospect, given that Ethiopia, as Moscow and Havana promised, did not invade Somalia, it is highly unlikely that the task force would have had much effect other than to sour Soviet-American relations more than they already were.

Brzezinski was also concerned about appearing weak to the United States' Middle Eastern allies in Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, disdainfully rejecting Assistant Secretary of State Robert Moose's assertion that "the best defense of Somali borders would be to advertise widely the assurances given by Mengistu and the Soviets." Brzezinski indicated that he was willing to send American troops to Africa or support Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, or Iranian troops, a move to which Vance vociferously objected. In addition, Dr. Brzezinski and Secretary Brown conveyed a willingness to create ways to assist Somalia with arms, while Asst. Sec. Moose insisted that they needed to be aware of the legality or illegality of such actions under restriction imposed by the Senate. Again, the National Security Advisor was just itching to do something, *anything* to take a stand against the Soviet Union. Given Congressional restrictions on military aid and the American public's unwillingness to commit American troops abroad with the memory of Vietnam still recent, Brzezinski's proposals were highly implausible scenarios. Most likely, he just wanted to be on record as the one who promoted a harder-line. The next time the Soviets overstepped what the United States saw as the bounds of détente, which Brzezinski was certain would happen, he could then tell the President that he had been right.

In the area of Soviet-American bilateral relations, divergent views were once again readily apparent. Oddly, in light of the future of such debate, Mr. Aaron was the

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<sup>23</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 189.

one who suggested that the only political item that might get the Soviets' attention was SALT and Dr. Brzezinski replied that he felt the Soviets were relatively indifferent to SALT. Instead, he proposed technology transfers to China intending to make the Soviets nervous and pay for their activity in the Horn. Secretary Vance chose to reserve judgment on such a strategy.<sup>24</sup> As discussed later in the chapter, Brzezinski ultimately got his way on China and technology transfers after the United States failed to gain leverage on the Horn, but for now the subject rested.

As a result of the meeting, President Carter issued the Presidential Directive/NSC-32, to direct American policy on the Horn. First, the United States would not yet press for a UN resolution and would instead encourage Nigeria to create consensus in the OAU. This was done in hope that Africans would bring the issue to the UN on their own initiative. Second, the United States would consult with its Middle Eastern allies on the subject of arms transfers to Somalia. The administration wanted to reiterate that no American arms must be sent to Somalia, but that Carter would consult with Congress to supply Somalia with proper defensive measures, should Somalia be invaded. Third, the President rejected the notion of deploying a US Carrier Task Force to the Region. Finally, Washington would publicize widely Soviet and Cuban involvement in Ethiopia, including the fact that Soviet General V.I. Petrov was commanding Ethiopian forces.<sup>25</sup> This last measure, which was meant as a compromise between the two divergent views, would be the one that sent the United States on the path to the concept of linkage and the Horn's influence on the death of détente.

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<sup>24</sup> Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 22 February, 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28. *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*, JCPL.

<sup>25</sup> Presidential Directive/NSC-32. 24 February 1978. *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

In a very convincing memorandum to Brzezinski titled “Possible Actions to Drive Home to the Soviets and Cubans the need to moderate their Intervention in the Horn,” Paul Henze, spelled out the problems the United States faced in the Horn and a list of potential remedies. He pointed out that the Soviets and Cubans had legality and African sentiment behind them. In addition, there were many risks inherent to promising assistance to Somalia should the Ethiopians invade. Mainly, Congress might not approve involvement which could in turn cause a major political and psychological defeat. Though he worked for the National Security Advisor, Henze emphasised caution in dealing with the Horn, understanding the pitfalls of appearing to support Siad Barre. However, in agreement with Brzezinski, he saw the cooling of relations with the Soviets and Cubans as the only viable way to express American concern on the issue. His suggestions included: suspending SALT, limiting transfers of technology and other economic relations, abandoning joint space ventures, and demonstrating efforts to consult with the Chinese.<sup>26</sup> This idea of “linkage” was growing.

The 22 February meeting represented the first of several major disagreements between Vance and Brzezinski over the Horn and the President, as he would do repeatedly on this issue, chose Vance’s recommendations, while giving a slight nod to Brzezinski’s proposals. In this case, Carter made some decisions about handling the crisis, but appeared not to have understood the broader implications of their debate. Their angry words may have served their president better if they had settled down to explain what their views represented.

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<sup>26</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze. 1 March 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

## The Debate

Much of the attention in the press had been invited by the US government. Brzezinski, with Carter's permission, had begun publicising the Soviet and Cuban assistance to Ethiopia in the autumn of 1977.<sup>27</sup> The President had soon followed suit. This trend continued into his second year in office. In press conferences, Carter brought up the matter though it was often unsolicited. For example, on 17 February, in response to a question on American arms to the Middle East and the rationalisation that the administration was still furthering peace, he responded that the Soviets were shipping massive amounts of arms into the region, including Ethiopia, and the United States had an obligation to assist its friends.<sup>28</sup> In a question and answer session later the same day in Bangor, Maine, he handled another question on the Middle East in similar fashion, even going so far as to ridiculously exaggerate the threat to Egypt. "But you have to remember that we cannot abandon our own friends in the Middle East. If we did, Egypt would soon be overrun from Libya or perhaps even Ethiopia. And we cannot afford to let that happen."<sup>29</sup>

Brzezinski had succeeded in bringing the Soviet involvement in the Horn into the public domain as members of the press began to raise the issue on their own. On 2 March, journalist Warren Rogers asked the question that must have delighted the National Security Advisor, "With the Soviets active now in the Horn of Africa, and with other strains on U.S.-Soviet relations, what hope do you have for early resumption of

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<sup>27</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Power and Principle*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> "The President's News Conference of February 17, 1978." Providence, RI. *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>29</sup> "Bangor, Maine Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting, February 17th, 1978" *The American Presidency Project*.

SALT talks?”<sup>30</sup> In a verbal hair-splitting argument that Brzezinski had been promoting, Carter’s response sent a mixed message. First, he insisted that “we do not initiate any Government policy that has a linkage between the Soviet involvement in Ethiopia-Somalia dispute on the one hand and SALT or the comprehensive test ban negotiations on the other.”<sup>31</sup> Then, after further haranguing of the Soviet actions in the region, he returned to the issue of linkage.

The Soviets' violating of these principles would be a cause of concern to me, would lessen the confidence of the American people in the word and peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union, would make it more difficult to ratify a SALT agreement or comprehensive test ban agreement if concluded, and therefore, the two are linked because of actions by the Soviets. We don't initiate the linkage.<sup>32</sup>

Cyrus Vance was absolutely livid, because Brzezinski had successfully created a linkage when they had all agreed there was none.

That same day witnessed the fallout from the President’s press conference in a fascinating set of exchanges between Vance and Brzezinski during another SCC meeting. The dramatic dialogue illustrated that the players understood that they were competing for the future direction of American foreign policy. Both men believed that the consequences of following the other’s advice would be dire.

CV: I want you to know what I said in hearings before Congress yesterday. I was asked, ‘Is there linkage between what is going on in the Horn and SALT?’ I replied, ‘There is not.’ I did have to recognize that what is happening could affect the political atmosphere. I made a speech for about two minutes on the importance of SALT.

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<sup>30</sup> “The President’s News Conference of March 2, 1978, National Press Club, Washington, D.C.” *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

ZB: The President said in response to a question this noon that there is no linkage but Soviet actions may impose such linkage.

CV: That is wrong. I think that is wrong to say that this is going to produce linkage, and it is of fundamental importance.

ZB: It is going to poison the atmosphere.

CV: We will end up losing SALT and that will be the worst thing that could happen. If we do not get a SALT treaty in the President's first four years, that will be a blemish on his record forever.

ZB: It will be a blemish on his record also if a treaty gets rejected by the senate.

CV: Zbig, you yesterday and the President today said it may create linkage and I think it is wrong to say that.<sup>33</sup>

The argument got to the heart of several issues. The first was the different level of importance each accorded SALT. Clearly, Vance believed that it was the single most important foreign policy project for the administration, while Brzezinski relegated the treaty to second-class status behind sending a message of strength to the Soviets. The second issue was one of semantics that plays out like a schoolyard fight. In order to deny that they were indeed linking SALT and Soviet activity in the Horn, Brzezinski and President Carter insisted that the Soviets were creating the linkage essentially by acting against American wishes. Vance understood the absurdity of this hair-splitting. To him, the administration's use of the term "linkage" meant that the United States was invoking the linkage. A third issue was a disagreement over the way in which SALT could *potentially* fail. (At this point, while there was some vocal opposition to SALT, the administration still had reason to hope it would be successfully ratified). Brzezinski

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<sup>33</sup> "SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, 2 March 1978." Subject File, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

supposed that some senators would be inclined to reject the treaty if they felt that the United States was unable to use it as leverage to dictate other Soviet policies. Vance, on the other, was of the opinion that members of the Senate were unlikely to create their own linkage between SALT and the Horn if the administration did not do so publicly. He wanted SALT to be judged only on its own merits. In a recent interview, Brzezinski recalled the fallout from this argument claiming, “Well, he (Vance), of course, didn’t agree so he took it to the President and the President agreed with me.”<sup>34</sup> As the two men tried to undercut the other with the President, Carter began to take Brzezinski’s side more often.

Later in the same discussion, the National Security Advisor was increasingly frustrated by American relative inaction in relation to the Horn. Brzezinski’s comments included reference to the fear that the Soviets would use success in the Horn as justification to embroil themselves in the unfolding events in Rhodesia.

CV: [W]e are at the point where we are on the brink of ending up with a real souring of relations between ourselves and the Soviet Union and it may take a helluva long while to change and may not be changed for years and I think that is a very important step to take—we should examine it carefully before we go down that road...

ZB: On this business of souring relations with the Soviets the real question is why are they being soured? Do the Soviets want to sour these relations? If they can do what they want in the Horn without getting evidence of concern from us, we are going to have major problems with them in the south. We should communicate to the Soviets that they do not have free hand and that what they do entails risks. Otherwise, what will they think?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Author’s interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

<sup>35</sup>“SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, 2 March 1978.” Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

Brzezinski's final line exposed his indignation and black and white sense of justice when it came to the Soviet Union. He sincerely judged Soviet involvement in Africa as wrong and did not think it was fair to let them get away with it. Much of Vance's professional training and incidents in which he had had success were based on negotiations in troubled spots, whether domestic riots in Detroit or Greco-Turkish rivalries in Cyprus. He looked to find common ground with the Soviets and alleviate tensions. Brzezinski, on the other hand, believed that accommodation could lead to a perception of weakness and he consistently emphasised the importance of an appearance of strength. In his memoirs, he included an annex of his weekly opinion reports for the President's eyes only. Among these notes, he repeatedly recommended that Carter find some areas where he could prove his toughness. In a rather amusing recommendation, on 24 February 1978, Brzezinski titled his memorandum, "the Psychology of Presidential Power."

A President must not only be loved and respected, but also feared. I suggest that you try to dispel the impression that you and the Administration are too cerebral by picking some controversial subject and acting with anger and roughness to demonstrate that no one can pick a fight with the U.S.<sup>36</sup>

The conflict in the Horn of Africa was an area where Brzezinski felt the President could take such a step.

Vance was also worried about the appearance of weakness on the part of the administration, but felt that the US government was creating this perception itself, not by avoiding by confrontation, but by setting unrealistic goals. In his memoirs, he conveyed his feelings after Carter's 2 March press conference and the subsequent SCC meeting.

We were shooting ourselves in the foot. By casting the complex Horn situation in East-West terms and by setting

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<sup>36</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 561.

impossible objectives for U.S. policy—elimination of Soviet and Cuban influence in Ethiopia—we were creating a perception that we were defeated when, in fact, we were achieving a successful outcome.<sup>37</sup>

He had an excellent point in that Somalia was withdrawing from the Ogaden and a counter-invasion from Ethiopia did not appear to be on the horizon. By complaining loudly and publicly about the Soviet role, the United States was pointing out to the world that it had no other recourse to counter the influence of the USSR and Cuba. The rhetoric of Brzezinski and now Carter was contributing the public's sense that the administration was weak on foreign policy. At this point, though, it was too late to backtrack on the public relations blitz.

Along with the summary of conclusions of the 2 March meeting, Brzezinski, in an attempt to undermine Vance, attached a memo to the President titled, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations" in which he argued that the recommendations of the SCC did not go far enough. He spelled out his perception of Soviet motivations as desiring stability in its relations with the United States in areas convenient to the USSR so that it could actively expand its influence in the Third World. He also postulated that the administration was going to be under attack from the Right for demonstrating weakness towards the Soviet Union. "Whether we like it or not, there is thus a linkage. To pretend that it does not exist is simply to evade reality; moreover, the Soviets do want SALT and in some respects they may need it even more than we." He went on to recommend that "we should also continue to reiterate the point that we are not imposing linkages but the Soviets are creating them, including SALT." In a hand-written notation on the front of the memo, Carter wrote, "I'm concerned, but we mustn't

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<sup>37</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 88.

overreact.”<sup>38</sup> Although the President had publicly consented that the Soviets were potentially imposing “linkage” on bilateral relations, he had not yet felt the need to make this official policy. That both Brzezinski and Vance went straight to the President after the meeting to defend their views indicated the importance each assigned to the issue. Carter, though, did not seem to realize that the argument was about more than the American response to a far away conflict, that it actually represented two competing blueprints to a comprehensive foreign policy. Instead, the President tried to balance the conflicting opinions of his top advisors, an approach that only postponed an inevitable schism in his foreign policy team.

### **Proposals for Action**

Though most of the activity dealing with the crisis in the Horn centred on the NSC and State Department, the CIA was not idle. At the end of the 2 March SCC meeting, CIA Director Turner mentioned that he had submitted ideas for a strategy of disinformation for the CIA to carry out on the Horn.<sup>39</sup> How far this scheme went is still unclear, but the administration had to deal with tighter restrictions on covert activity than its predecessors. Paul Henze complained about implementation problems of covert action programs, blaming sluggishness on “bureaucratic foot-dragging and legalistic squabbling at middle levels of the bureaucracy.”<sup>40</sup> While he credited field officers with creative suggestions, he was frustrated that relatively few ever materialized. He continued that

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<sup>38</sup> Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President. 3 March 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>39</sup> SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, 2 March 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>40</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Rick Inderfurth. 27 April 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

any plans were dragged down by legalities with “the Attorney General’s Office ordinarily giving very restrictive interpretations of requirements for Presidential Findings and Congressional briefings.” He then mentions “the extended argumentation over the problem of Cubans in Africa.”<sup>41</sup> The CIA had attempted several covert propaganda wars in Angola, Ethiopia, and had even discussed directing the information at the Cuban people themselves. Washington felt that Castro was vulnerable in this area with the Cuban people looking to blame economic austerity on the government’s Africa policy.<sup>42</sup> However, this may have been as far as covert operations went. While the CIA documents are not yet available, this memorandum indicated that the intelligence organization was not heavily involved or if it was, the NSC did not know the extent of it. Still, the CIA was a main source of intelligence gathering. The Agency had excellent information on the types and location of Soviet and Cuban troops, including the fact that a Soviet General was directing the Ogaden campaign.<sup>43</sup>

In response to a request by the NSC, the CIA prepared a memorandum to assess the impact of an impending Soviet and Cuban supported Ethiopian victory against Somali forces. CIA Director Turner advised Dr. Brzezinski that the Soviets likely believed that there would be little impact on SALT as long as the conflict ended soon, but they would certainly monitor the impact on Congress. In addition, he believed that the Soviets “will look upon their Ethiopian achievement as advertising to revolutionary forces in southern Africa their readiness and capability to act, and as providing a springboard from which to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> “Memorandum from Bob Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski of 28 February attached to a memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1 March, 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>43</sup> “Soviet Involvement in Ethiopia” 17 March, 1978. CREST. NAIH.

seize other opportunities to expand their role in armed struggles should they appear.”<sup>44</sup>

This fear of Soviet expansion into the conflict in southern Africa was of particular concern as the United States would be unable to oppose the Soviets without being seen to side with the parties promoting white minority rule. These analyses, however, never translated themselves into policy and administration continued to struggle for a cohesive response.

Brzezinski was virtually alone within the administration in his desire to demonstrate concrete support for Somalia. His colleague, Paul Henze, was concerned about a rush to supply arms to Siad Barre. Refreshingly, he warned that Somalia was the aggressor and Siad Barre “makes a poor hero by any standards acceptable in the West.”<sup>45</sup> He reiterated that the United States’ main objectives were to get the Soviets and Cubans out of the Horn and alleviate tensions between Somalia and its neighbours. The main pressure to supply arms to Siad Barre was coming from Iran and Saudi Arabia, but the possible fallout of doing so was worse than a little tension with Tehran and Riyadh. Finally, Henze conveyed the differences in perceptions of Congressional pressure at this point. The State Department believed that Congress supported the idea of defensive arms for Somalia. Henze thought that this was overplayed, calling congressional understanding of the conflict in the Horn “ill-formed as well as ill-informed.”<sup>46</sup> This difference in perception is not surprising as individual members of Congress are more likely to contact the State Department than the NSC when concerned about a certain region. Still, that Congress might consider weapons for Somalia, a proven aggressor, just

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<sup>44</sup> “CIA Intelligence Memorandum. “Possible Repercussions of a Soviet Win in Ethiopia/Somalia” 6 March 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>45</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul Henze. 16 March 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

a couple of years after they had limited the Ford administration's ability to arm the FNLA and UNITA in Angola, demonstrated that the country as a whole was recovering from its Vietnam syndrome and willing once again to revert to a policy of containment.

The American decision to publicise widely the extent of Soviet involvement in the Horn was not lost on the USSR. Soviet-American relations were deteriorating rapidly. The Soviets and many in the State department attributed this to Brzezinski's comments to the press. On 8 March, former Ambassador to the Soviet Union, veteran of the Paris Peace Talks, and State Department envoy-at-large, W. Averell Harriman met with Carter to discuss Soviet-American affairs. He had desired a one on one meeting with the President but Brzezinski joined them. Harriman, in his memorandum of the conversation, asserted that "I couldn't be quite as blunt as I wanted to be, with Brzezinski present."<sup>47</sup> They discussed the Horn of Africa in great detail. Harriman made the point that "the more we made demands in public, the more difficult it was for the Soviets to accede."<sup>48</sup> He went on to recommend that the White House should cease to give press conferences on the subject. The incident served to further illustrate that despite the many voices advocating a quiet response to Soviet and Cuban manoeuvres, Brzezinski was able to keep a high profile and influence the manner in which the President received some of his information.

Brzezinski must have been delighted that Congress and the American public were aligning with his harder-line toward the Soviet Union. However, because of the divergent views within the administration as well as his own gambles, he was unable to

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<sup>47</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, W. Averell Harriman and President Carter, White House, 8 Mar 1978, 11:45." Box IV *The W. Averell Harriman Papers*. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Washington, DC.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

control the direction it took. He still supported SALT and did not necessarily want to lose it. Instead, he thought that the administration could get the agreement from a position of power. He may have been right vis-à-vis the Senate. It is less clear why he thought he could make the Soviets do as he wished. Regardless, the American policy toward the Horn was not working. If there was much of a CIA presence, the effect was negligible. The Soviets and Cubans were clearly going to leave only in their own time. The American response had now taken on a life of its own where the administration had no plan, but it was too late to drop the issue and pretend it did not matter, which led to the concept of linkage.

### **Search for Leverage**

The United States did try to regain some influence in the Horn to combat its helpless image in the region. Particularly, Washington needed to demonstrate to its Middle Eastern allies that it had not given up on issues of mutual concern. However, the task was made more difficult by the lack of interest in Addis Ababa and the lack of integrity in Mogadishu. Ethiopia was quite happy with Soviet and Cuban patronage after they joined to repel Somalia from the Ogaden. Somalia was still keen for closer ties with the United States, but American officials found Siad Barre so unsavoury that they could not bring themselves to fully support him. Therefore, in the meantime, the United States looked for leverage with the Soviet Union.

On the morning of 16 March, Secretary Vance met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to discuss the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, SALT and other matters. The Secretary of State expressed his satisfaction that the Somalis had withdrawn

from Ethiopia and that Ethiopian troops had respected the border. Dobrynin responded that the United States could facilitate the withdrawal of Soviet forces if the administration refrained from making public statements that would cause the appearance of a Soviet withdrawal under pressure. Further, neither the USSR nor Cuba wished to become involved in the fight with Eritrea. Dobrynin also claimed American hypocrisy on the matter given the US military presence in Iran. Finally, he mentioned that Somalia had recently questioned the Soviet Union on a possible revival of the idea of a communist federation on the Horn. (Castro had proposed this idea to Siad Barre in the spring of 1977, but had been firmly rebuffed).<sup>49</sup> The Soviets, at this point, did not take American indignation at their involvement in the Horn very seriously. Instead, they treated it as an irritant to be dealt with before moving on to other matters.

The SCC had met on 15 March and again on 16 March to discuss policy toward the various players in the Horn. While the participants agreed that the American Ambassador to Somalia should once again reiterate their concern about Somali participation in the Ogaden insurgency, Secretary Vance and Dr. Brzezinski agreed that the United States should still send a military survey team to give the appearance of support and progress toward an agreement in order to reassure regional allies. The group also decided to contact the Cubans directly to express American concerns over Cuban support for Ethiopian combat activity in Eritrea. Finally, “the possibility of a limited covert action program in Ethiopia was considered but was rejected as being of only marginal significance.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Vance and Ambassador Dobrynin.” 16 March 1978. *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

<sup>50</sup> “SCC Meeting on the Horn of Africa, 15 May, 1978.” *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

As a result of Assistant Secretary Moose's visit to Somalia, the members of the SCC created a more cohesive policy toward the country. First, the United States wanted to consolidate its political position with Siad Barre and Somalia. Second, it hoped to restrain Somali irredentism. Third, it would try to prevent the Soviet Union from restoring its influence in Somalia. The SCC then agreed that Assistant Secretary Moose was authorized to offer a non-lethal military package as well as economic assistance to Siad Barre, provided that he promise to respect internationally recognized borders with his neighbours.<sup>51</sup> This decision, like the one taken the previous summer to provide arms to Somalia prior to Siad Barre's attack on Ethiopian territory, was a prime example of the mistakes made by viewing all conflict with tunnel vision focused on superpower rivalry. The Carter administration had intended to map a new direction in its foreign policy: reducing the international threat of war through arms reductions and an overall lessening of Cold War tensions, standing up for the concept of freedom through an emphasis on human rights, and righting past injustices through negotiated settlements on such issues as the Panama Canal. Instead, it found itself promising arms to a proven aggressor.

As of late March, having pushed Somalia back to its borders, the Ethiopian government turned its attention to crushing the renewed Eritrean insurgency. This created new dilemmas for the Soviets and Cubans and the United States struggled to formulate a response as the administration tried to anticipate what might happen next. The State Department concluded that there were three options for approaching the Eritrean independence struggle. First, the United States could maintain a "hands-off" policy toward the conflict, ignoring the Sudanese and Arab support of the insurgency,

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<sup>51</sup> "SCC Meeting on the Horn of Africa, 16 March 1978." Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

and publicly favour a settlement between the EPMG and Eritreans. Second, the United States could actively promote mediation and negotiation in order to reduce the need for a large Soviet and Cuban presence in Ethiopia. Third, the United States could encourage the Eritrean insurgency via the Arab States or American covert action, in order to raise the cost of Soviet and Cuban involvement.<sup>52</sup> Both Secretary Vance and Secretary Brown preferred the first option, though each would consider the second. The main problem with attempting to become involved in mediation and negotiation between the parties was that the United States had little influence to be able to succeed. Dr. Brzezinski was willing to consider the third option, though he preferred encouraging the Sudanese and Saudis to do the dirty work. However, as he did not attend the SCC meeting on 27 March 1978, the discussants maintained general agreement toward detachment from the Eritrean situation.<sup>53</sup> When presented with these options and the opinions of his top advisors, President Carter, in a hand-written response, decided to “support a negotiated solution more strongly, repeat public statements deploring violence and foreign military involvement, [and] let any foreign assistance to insurgents continue without our involvement.”<sup>54</sup> This last aspect demonstrated American sensitivity to its regional allies as well as American recognition that the conflict was also a Middle Eastern problem.

Additionally, during the late March SCC meeting, Assistant Secretary of State Moose reported back on his six day mission to Mogadishu. He had offered, on behalf of the President, an immediate non-lethal military package to be followed by an assessment

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<sup>52</sup> “SCC Meeting Briefing Material for 23 March 1978.” (The actual meeting didn’t take place until 27 March). *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

<sup>53</sup> SCC Meeting on Eritrea. 27 March 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>54</sup> “Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter.” 7 April 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

team who could then make recommendations on subsequent packages of lethal weapons. Furthermore, he offered economic support, obviously critical to the Somali people. Siad Barre was interested in none of this. He continued to stress his urgent need for artillery, aircraft, and tanks to prove to his army that he had significant international support. His lack of concern for the welfare of the Somali people apparently startled no one as the members of the SCC actively considered his request, partially at the behest of the Saudi Arabians.<sup>55</sup> Still, he had not done himself any favours by refusing to make a public statement that he would in the future respect the territorial integrity of his neighbours, and asking for significantly more than was offered without any leverage whatsoever. After the mission, Paul Henze described Siad Barre as “a narrow, vain, intense, suspicious man.” He added, “Siad has nothing to offer his people but demands for more planes, tanks and artillery”<sup>56</sup>

After the meeting in Mogadishu, Moose and Henze had stopped in Jeddah for a talk with the Saudi vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdal Rhaman Al-Mansouri. The minister admitted that Saudi Arabia had encouraged Somalia to invade the Ogaden as they thought that it would bring down Mengistu. They were committed to keeping communism out of the region. Indeed, Saudi Arabia had no interest in any cross-border ideological movement taking root in the area. Al-Mansouri indicated that Saudi Arabia was interested in weakening the Russians and Cubans in the region. “But first we want to talk with you about how you see the whole strategy in this region. We do not want to

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<sup>55</sup> SCC Meeting on the Horn of Africa. 27 March 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>56</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski on the Moose Mission to Somalia, 27 March 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

waste money on tactics unless they are part of a strategy.”<sup>57</sup> At the same time, Sudan, Iran, and Egypt were also looking to the United States to form a plan.

Despite the intransigent attitude of the Somali leader, the SCC decided on 7 April 1978 that the United States would offer a \$10 million non-lethal package and a \$5 million lethal package of defensive equipment in exchange for a written promise from Siad Barre to respect his borders.<sup>58</sup> Shortly after the American diplomatic mission to Somalia and two days after the decision to provide arms to Somalia, on 9 April, there was an attempted coup against Siad Barre. After the Somali defeat in the Ogaden, the dictator had carried out purges of many of his officers. These men largely came from clans in central and northern Somalia who had a long-standing conflict with Siad Barre’s own clan. Several officers who had survived the purges attempted to bring down the President hoping that he had been weakened by the Ogaden defeat. Siad Barre discovered the plan ahead of time and the coup collapsed within twenty-four hours.<sup>59</sup>

Despite or perhaps because of the threats to Siad Barre’s grip on power, Somalia continued to support insurgents in the Ogaden. A CIA intelligence memorandum of 9 May assessed that Somali officers were still leading groups of insurgents and Mogadishu was still supplying arms and other support to the rebellion, even if this was limited given general Somali shortages. Though the CIA felt that the insurgency could not succeed, the

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<sup>57</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski on meeting with Saudi vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Al-Mansouri, 23 March 1978.” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>58</sup> SCC Meeting. 7 April 1978. Subject File/ SCC meetings, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*. JCPL.

<sup>59</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum on the coup attempt in Somalia.” CIA National Foreign Assessment Center. 8 May 1978. Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

Agency feared Ethiopian reprisals could include the invasion of Somalia.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately for the administration, the Soviets and Cubans believed that this acted as justification for the continuing presence of Cuban troops.

### **Linkage**

After the fervent disagreements between Vance and Brzezinski in the 2 March SCC meeting and their subsequent appeals to the President to listen to their respective points of views, Carter clearly toned down his public rhetoric linking Soviet behaviour in Africa to détente for the next two months.<sup>61</sup> When reporters brought up the subject of the Horn several times in press conferences, he reiterated disapproval of the Soviet and Cuban involvement, but did not bring it up in the context of other bilateral issues or he stuck to discussing arms for Somalia when they withdrew from the Ogaden.<sup>62</sup> During the first week of April, Carter, accompanied by Secretary Vance, became the first American president to go to sub-Saharan Africa, when he visited Nigeria and Liberia. The issues at hand were independence and majority rule for Rhodesia, the strengthening of the OAU and foreign influence in Africa. The US government tried to use the last of this list to put pressure on Cuba and the Soviet Union, though the Africans, of course, were referring just as much to American presence. In a press conference on board Air Force One, en route to Monrovia, Liberia, Vance addressed a couple of questions on the Soviet and Cuban commitment to Ethiopia and particularly the Nigerian position on it. Vance

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<sup>60</sup>“Intelligence Memorandum on Somalia and Insurgency in the Ogaden.” CIA National Foreign Assessment Center. 9 May 1978. Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>61</sup> Note that this also occurred just after the President’s meeting with Averell Harriman, who had recommended that Carter cease to give press conferences on the Horn.

<sup>62</sup> See several press conferences during the months of March and April found in *the American Presidency Project*.

remained circumspect and diplomatic, referring only to the general African wish that African problems be left to Africans.<sup>63</sup> Evidently, his moderation affected the President, who, upon joining the discussion, acted with similar restraint.

Despite this brief lull, in which the publicity on the Horn subsided and the administration seemed to take a less aggressive stance toward the Soviet Union, Brzezinski had clearly regained the upper hand by May. In no uncertain terms, the President reiterated the effect Soviet behaviour in the Third World was having on bilateral relations.

The Soviets have gone into Ethiopia, using Cuban troops to fight against Somalia. I deplore this very much. In the strongest possible terms we have let the Soviets and the Cubans know that this is a danger to American-Soviet friendship and to the nurturing and enhancement of the principle of détente.<sup>64</sup>

A week later, Carter again fielded questions on the subject of the Soviet Union and Cuba in Africa, this time from members of the Hispanic Press.<sup>65</sup> The first question was particularly loaded with the implication that the administration was not doing enough. “Mr. President, what does the United States plan to do in practice to denounce and to counter the Soviet-Cuban influence in Africa, besides your warnings?”<sup>66</sup> Once again, the President, though this time rather defensively, drew the parallel that Brzezinski had been making, mainly that Soviet activity in Africa adversely affected the USSR’s relations with the American people, not the US government.

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<sup>63</sup> “The President’s Trip to Africa Remarks During a Briefing for Reporters on Board Air Force One en Route to Monrovia, Liberia, April 3rd, 1978” *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>64</sup> “Spokane, Washington Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting, May 5th, 1978” *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>65</sup> The Hispanic Press was interested particularly in the Cuban role. In particular, the Cuban-American lobby and press are famously anti-Castro.

<sup>66</sup> “Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Representatives of the Hispanic Media, May 12th, 1978” *The American Presidency Project*.

Well, when you say besides the warnings, that covers a lot of territory. I have let Brezhnev know directly from me to him, plus through his own Ambassador and Secretary of State Vance when he was there, that the Soviets' continuation of intrusion into Africa with military forces was a major obstacle to trust on the part of the American people that the Soviets want peace and want to have a successful detente effort.<sup>67</sup>

This was a both a simple truth and an attempt to pressure the Soviet Union by laying the blame outside of the US government. Détente did depend on the goodwill of the American people. However, by maintaining such a public stance on the issue, Brzezinski and Carter had joined the right wing in making the Horn matter to the American people.

A week later, in answer to yet another question on the Soviets in Africa, Carter again condemned Soviet assistance to Ethiopia, this time in suppression of the Eritrean insurgency, an internal Ethiopian matter, differentiating it from helping push back the Somali invasion.<sup>68</sup> Given that the USSR and Cuba had not withdrawn their militaries from Ethiopia after the Somali withdrawal, the US government felt it had proof that the communist powers were not planning on leaving the region. Many in the United States, including former President Ford, believed this upped the ante on American competition with the USSR. On 25 May, the President, under pressure from the right, made his strongest statement yet on the relationship between the Soviet involvement in Africa and SALT.

[T]here is no doubt that if the Soviets continue to abuse human rights, to punish people who are monitoring the Soviets' compliance with the Helsinki agreement, which they signed on their own free will, and unless they show some constraints on their own involvement in Africa and on their sending Cuban troops to be involved in Africa, it

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Editors and News Directors, May 19th, 1978" *The American Presidency Project*.

will make it much more difficult to conclude a SALT agreement and to have it ratified once it is written.<sup>69</sup>

Though the Somali-Ethiopian war was over and the administration could do nothing to change the outcome, Brzezinski was finally getting his way.

The President's public statements demonstrated that he was being pulled in two different directions and he hadn't yet made up his mind which route he wanted to follow. It appeared as if he advocated the position of whomever had spoken to him most recently. Brzezinski was quite clever in framing his argument about linkage in terms of the reality of American public opinion making the connection rather than it being the official policy of the US government. Carter never did make linkage an official policy, but the next chapter will reveal how the Soviet participation in the war in the Horn did indeed attach itself to SALT.

### **If Not the Horn?**

First, however, the Horn attached itself to another foreign policy challenge for the United States, its relationship with communist China. In the midst of the debates between Vance and Brzezinski, President Carter was presented with the opportunity to finish what President Nixon had started with his historic visit to Beijing in 1972 and officially recognize the People's Republic of China. As mentioned previously, this was another realm in which Vance and Brzezinski agreed on the ends but disagreed on the means of achieving them. The Secretary of State hoped to establish diplomatic relations with China while carefully reassuring the Soviet Union that this was not meant as a deliberate move on the part of Washington to ally itself with Beijing against Moscow. The National

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<sup>69</sup> "The President's News Conference of May 25, 1978, Chicago, Illinois." *The American Presidency Project*.

Security Advisor, though, believed that allying with Beijing against Moscow would increase American leverage with the Soviets. Since Brzezinski had failed to make linkage of SALT with Soviet and Cuban intervention in the Horn an official policy, he refocused his energies onto “playing the China card” to persuade the Soviets into more acceptable behaviour in the Third World.<sup>70</sup> Carter accepted this reasoning and sent Brzezinski, over Vance’s objections, to Beijing on 20 May 1978.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of improving relations with China, Brzezinski’s visit was a great success. By all accounts, he and Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping got along famously. The National Security Advisor laid out the guidelines along which the United States was prepared to bestow full diplomatic recognition upon Beijing, which were well received by Deng. According to Brzezinski, upon his return to Washington, Carter was ecstatic and gave his National Security Advisor a bear hug.<sup>72</sup> In the larger strategic scale, the visit was harder to measure. Brzezinski publicly made several anti-Soviet remarks during his time in China that were seized upon by the press. While climbing up a steep incline on the Great Wall, he challenged his companions that the last to reach the top would be sent to Ethiopia to challenge the Cubans and Soviets.<sup>73</sup> Vance, in his memoirs, blamed Brzezinski for “allow[ing] his trip to be characterized as a deliberate countermove by the United States at a time of worsening relations with Moscow over the Horn of Africa and other issues.”<sup>74</sup> The trip certainly exacerbated the disagreements between Vance and

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<sup>70</sup> Raymond Garthoff made the argument that after rejecting linkage of Soviet and Cuban intervention in the Horn to SALT, China was the only card the United States had left to play. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 661.

<sup>71</sup> Vice-President Mondale also objected to the visit because he wanted to go himself. See Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 205 and Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 115.

<sup>72</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 219.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 210.

<sup>74</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 116.

Brzezinski, but also improved the latter's position as the man who could deliver in the president's eyes.<sup>75</sup>

Brzezinski turned to the "China Card" when his plan to use the Horn as leverage against the Soviets failed. In part, he was able to do this because there was unanimous support within the administration to make progress on normalisation with the Chinese. Also, the President, at this point, was so incredibly eager for an immediate foreign policy success that he did not overly concern himself with the larger picture of how friendly Chinese-American relations would be perceived by the Soviet Union. Of course, Brzezinski took his mission further than his official mandate by implying that Washington would be willing to side with Beijing over Moscow, a move that obviously was not well-received in the latter. The Soviets were definitely now feeling very defensive. In this climate, Gromyko would visit Washington in what would turn out to be rather disastrous, history-influencing meetings with Vance and Carter.

## **Conclusion**

The Carter Administration viewed the Horn of Africa situation first through superpower relations, second through Middle Eastern regional concerns, and last as an African conflict. The dilemma for the United States on Soviet-Cuban involvement in the Horn owed itself to that simple, straightforward policy of containment. From the outset, American options were limited because American ideology dictated that staying out of the conflict completely was inconceivable. Soviet presence in the Horn, regardless of motive, ensured that the United States took an interest. The conflict's importance,

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<sup>75</sup> In his memoirs, Brzezinski regretted his contributing to the public perception of a renewed clash with Vance during a post-China appearance on *Meet the Press*. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 219-220.

however, first gained momentum in the Carter administration because of the *perceived motives* of the Soviets. Many in the administration, most famously Brzezinski, believed that the Soviets and their Cuban proxies had embarked on a systematic process to expand communist influence in Africa and Soviet actions seemed to be proving them right.<sup>76</sup> From Angola to Ethiopia to rumoured assistance in Zaire, those who advocated this position feared that the next step was Rhodesia. In this light, they felt the United States had to challenge the USSR early before Moscow succeeded in gaining too many footholds on the continent. Others in the administration, including Cyrus Vance, believed that the Soviets had no grand design, but were taking advantage of individual opportunities. Vance and the State Department argued that the way to counter Soviet influence was with a long-term strategy to deny the USSR the opportunities to intervene in Africa. They differed in their diagnosis of the problem, but more important were their differences over the remedy.

While public opinion was conflicted, the anti-Soviet critics of détente latched onto the issue of the Horn, and this influence increased pressure on the administration to articulate a clear policy. Additionally, it was of paramount importance to the development of “linkage” of the Horn to SALT II. One result of the crisis was that it contributed to a sense of weakness about the Carter administration. For much of the 1970s, it seemed to Americans that the Soviet Union was in the ascent and the United States in decline in terms of global influence. This perception created a feeling of desperation among many members of the American government causing them to search for ways to counter the growing Soviet power.

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<sup>76</sup> The United States did understand at this point that Castro had his own revolutionary agenda, but also believed that the massive amount of financial assistance that the USSR gave to Cuba ensured that the Soviets had leverage to influence the Cubans.

Brzezinski and Vance did, of course, both believe that the United States was more powerful and had a better political system than the Soviet Union. Both believed that the United States would eventually win the Cold War. As an expert on the Soviet Union, the National Security Advisor knew many of the innate weaknesses of the Soviet system and consistently advocated making life very difficult for the USSR when it intervened abroad, hoping to speed up the process of victory and spread justice for the crimes he believed the Soviet Union had committed. The Secretary of State, on the other hand, understood better the limits of American power. His experience in the Defense Department during the Vietnam War had taught him that military superiority was not enough. Even the advantage of having good ideas and good intentions could not overcome Third World nationalism. As such, Vance believed that the United States needed to cease to support Third World leaders with questionable popular support. If it appeared that the Soviets made temporary gains, then it was not a problem, because eventually, as it had in Egypt, the Sudan and other places, innate nationalism would eventually rear its head and undermine Moscow's influence.

It was, of course, too late to actually influence the situation in the Horn of Africa. Now the linkage was only to punish the Soviets for what the United States perceived as breaking the rules of détente. The administration had mostly done Cyrus Vance and the State Department's bidding in refusing arms to Somalia as long as it was violating Ethiopia's border, and refusing to send a carrier task force to the region in a show of force. However, winning these arguments meant that the Soviets got their desired outcome in the Horn, and Brzezinski was able to use this to persuade Carter that the United States needed to show the USSR that there were repercussions to its actions.

## **Chapter V**

### **“No Soviet Napoleon in Africa”**

The period from late May 1978 until the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979 represented a fundamental change in the conduct of American Cold War policy. This transformation was influenced by more than one factor as indicated by the events and debates mentioned in previous chapters. However, a curious un-truth on the part of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, combined with the Carter administration's frustration over events on the Horn of Africa, set off a chain reaction that doomed SALT II and ended the era of superpower détente. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance struggled to maintain control over the direction of foreign policy, but this period saw him lose his ideological battle with his rival and colleague, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski.

In the spring of 1978, Vance still believed he had the upper hand and set the priorities for the upcoming year. Writing in his memoirs, he recalled that while the path for American policy remained clear, it would nevertheless be difficult.

During 1978, I was increasingly involved in the struggle to halt the growing polarization of U.S.-Soviet relations. Despite repeated top-level decisions not to link Africa and other Third World issues to our bilateral relationship with the Soviets or to the SALT negotiations, political pressures were building for the president to appear tougher. Although Carter refused to slow down negotiations, some of his advisors were less concerned about progress in SALT than in sending signals to the Soviets that their international activities were damaging U.S.-Soviet relations and that the administration was responding firmly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vance, Cyrus. *Hard Choices*. p. 99.

Vance attempted to be circumspect in his assessment of the issues facing superpower relations in the spring of 1978, but his frustration with the here-unnamed Brzezinski was evident. Though he would not give up on arms limitation until after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the momentum was already in the National Security Advisor's favour. As SALT was the lynchpin of the détente process, Carter's withdrawal of the agreement from the Senate after the invasion signalled the end of détente and a return to confrontation. However, détente was already a practice in decline and nowhere was this more evident than in the superpower exchanges over Ethiopia.

The Horn of Africa crisis placed the Carter administration in a classic catch-22 situation in relation to SALT. If the President did not respond forcefully to Soviet involvement in the Horn, then Congress and the American public would feel that they were already conceding too much to the Soviets. This, Brzezinski, in particular, feared would give fuel to the rising anti-SALT contingent led by Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson (D-WA). However, a tough response to Soviet activity in the Horn would remind Americans that Washington's definition of détente was not being met by the Soviets, again giving the United States little incentive to keep up its end of the bargain. *Time* magazine noted, after Carter's aggressive Naval Academy speech in early June, that his Congressional allies believed his tougher stance against the Soviets would make ratifying SALT all the more difficult.<sup>2</sup> The administration was also receiving pressure from the left for not going far enough to reach an early SALT agreement and further the ties of détente with the Soviet Union. Still, it was the anti-détente contingent that seemed to be gaining ground and as the ghosts of Vietnam moved further away, Americans were once again in the mood to assert US power in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> "Talking Tough to Moscow." *Time Magazine*, 19 June 1978.

By late March 1978, the American approach to Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Horn had not succeeded in undermining either socialist country's commitment to revolutionary regimes in Africa. If anything, the Soviets and Cubans looked at their involvement as a great success. The Carter administration was increasingly frustrated with its inability to find leverage with either of the communist states. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Special Coordinating Committee meetings, as well as public statements, exposed the large rift among administration officials on whether to link Soviet activity on the Horn to the larger issue of arms limitations. Though the key members of the foreign policy team agreed that "linkage" was not an official policy, public rhetoric from Carter and Brzezinski indicated otherwise. With the issue still up in the air, Secretary Vance travelled to Moscow to discuss SALT II negotiations from 20-22 April. This American insistence that Soviet involvement in Africa was important to bilateral relations strained the negotiations, despite the Soviet belief that the issue lay outside the realm of détente.

Still, both Vance and Gromyko stressed the positive in their March meetings to come to further agreement on SALT. Both sides made some concessions that enabled progress on the bilateral discussions; each hoped that an agreement could be concluded before the end of the year. As far as Vance was concerned, the earlier the two superpowers could produce an agreement, the better. The mood of the United States was swinging to the right and even some pro-SALT senators felt they needed to take a harder line against the Soviets to aid their prospects in the mid-term elections scheduled for November 1978.<sup>3</sup> If they could conclude an agreement before the end of the year, then

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<sup>3</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 100.

the SALT supporters could go on the offensive. The issue of the Soviets in Africa, however, continued to affect talks.

Though Soviet-American relations had already been worsening throughout the early part of President Carter's term, disagreements escalated during the period from summer 1978 to winter 1979. A chain of events from an ill-fated meeting between President Carter and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to the American administration's withdrawal of SALT from Senate consideration represented a period of rapid deterioration of Soviet-American relations. President Carter reacted intensely to a Soviet lie at that meeting in late May 1978 which further strained and therefore delayed an agreement on SALT. Afterwards the American administration remained helplessly frustrated with Soviet involvement in Africa throughout 1978-79. Determined to send a message to Moscow, Carter responded much more forcefully to any perceived Soviet involvement in the Third World, including an unnecessarily strong reaction to a clash between North and South Yemen. When Carter and Soviet President Brezhnev finally met to sign the treaty, mistrust and disdain overrode the accomplishment of the deal. In that atmosphere, the United States over-reacted to news of a Soviet military presence in Cuba, pushing SALT back again. Finally, the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979 gave Carter the much-needed excuse to pull the doomed treaty from consideration in the Senate and the arms race began again in earnest.

### **Gromyko's Lie**

New strains in bilateral relations were already painfully apparent in a meeting between Carter and Gromyko on 27 May 1978. The President had invited the Soviet Foreign

Minister to Washington as a follow-up to his March meetings in Moscow with Vance. They intended to further SALT negotiations, but both sides had other issues each now wished to raise. Carter was under tremendous domestic pressure during the spring of 1978 with approval polls in the mid-40s.<sup>4</sup> Though he had succeeded in getting the Panama Canal Treaty through the Senate, both his domestic and foreign policies were attracting heavy criticism.<sup>5</sup> Under fire from conservatives and from European and Japanese allies for his “tepid” response to the Soviet intervention in the Horn, suggesting a troop withdrawal from South Korea, cancelling the B-1 bomber, and “waffling” over the neutron bomb, Carter desperately needed a foreign policy victory.<sup>6</sup> He intended to express his displeasure on Soviet intervention in Ethiopia while Gromyko aimed to scold the United States for excluding the Soviet Union from talks in the Middle East and for sharing the contents of bilateral negotiations with the Chinese. Ultimately, the four hour conversation covered a range of subjects including: SALT, Africa, and human rights.

During the discussion, the President (after Brzezinski had passed him a reminder note) brought up the issue of Africa. He suggested to Gromyko that the Soviets could exert strong influence on the Cubans to refrain from assisting the Ethiopian army in its battle against Eritrean insurgents. He also indicated that the withdrawal of Soviet and Cuban troops from Africa would contribute to the improvement of Soviet-American relations. In response, Gromyko insisted that the Soviets were not increasing their presence in Africa nor were there any Soviet soldiers on the continent. (The U.S. had

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<sup>4</sup> “Carter’s Balance Sheet.” *Time Magazine*, 1 May 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Inflation was soaring and his economic proposals had little Congressional support.

<sup>6</sup> “Carter’s Balance Sheet.” *Time Magazine*, 1 May 1978.

accurate intelligence that said otherwise).<sup>7</sup> He continued that the Soviet Union had helped restrain hostilities in the Horn and that Ethiopia would have caused much more bloodshed without this restraint. Then, rather condescendingly, Gromyko explained that the Soviets had learned that President Mohammed Siad Barre of Somalia was untrustworthy and if the United States did not yet understand that, it would soon learn. He concluded his lengthy lecture by reassuring the President that the Soviet Union had no designs on Africa; that the USSR had enough of its own territory. President Carter responded that it was American understanding that a Soviet general had led the Ethiopian counterattack against Somalia and Soviet officers and Cuban troops remained in Ethiopia. Gromyko called the presence of a Soviet general in Ethiopia a “myth,” implying that the President “was being fed completely fantastic information,” insisting that “there was no Soviet Napoleon in Africa.”<sup>8</sup> Though the President ended the conversation on a polite note, the discussion had been highly combative and illustrated how much the Soviet-American relationship had deteriorated from the administration’s initially hopeful outlook.

In his memoirs, Brzezinski remembered the meeting as “largely unproductive” and “dominated by Gromyko’s mendacity and verbosity.” Apparently, the Soviet foreign minister, upon greeting the National Security Advisor, referred to the latter’s trip to China. Though it is conceivable that the insecurity that Sino-American cooperation brought out in the Soviets could have been one reason for Gromyko’s attitude during this

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<sup>7</sup> General V.I. Petrov had been in Ethiopia since November 1977 helping plan military operations in the Ogaden and Eritrea. “Soviet Foreign Ministry, Background Report on Soviet-Ethiopian Relations. 3 April 1978.” Russian and East German Documents on the Horn of Africa, 1977-78. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*. Issues 8-9, Winter 1996/1997, pp. 90-91.

<sup>8</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.” 27 May, 1978. *The Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

meeting, it was not the main focus of discussion. Brzezinski also recalled that “on contentious issues (that is, Africa), he [Gromyko] lied like a trooper,” and “on SALT, he was unforthcoming.”<sup>9</sup> Cyrus Vance recalled the state of Soviet-American relations at the time of the meeting as “at their lowest point in several years.” According to Vance, the President did not appreciate Gromyko’s insistence that the existence of Soviet military personnel in Ethiopia was not true. “Carter was furious,” Vance recalled, “he felt he was being deceived by Gromyko.”<sup>10</sup> This meeting and the President’s response to Gromyko’s lie would serve as the catalyst to complete Carter’s switch from Vance’s approach to that of Brzezinski. Carter had always prided himself on honesty and forthrightness as a politician. He was a deeply religious man and had run for office on a platform, in the wake of the untruths of the Nixon Administration, in which he promised never to lie to the American public. To not be shown the consideration of truth undermined his trust in dealing with the Soviets as well as in the overall détente process. In Carter’s mind, he had been up front and honest in his exchanges with the Soviet Union and he had put so much faith in getting a SALT treaty. He felt that he was working incredibly hard to save détente in the face of fierce domestic opposition, and the Soviets could not even give him the courtesy of the truth.

Still, Secretary Vance had not yet given up on getting the Soviets to at least understand the American point of view. In a meeting between the Secretary of State and Soviet Foreign Minister two days later, Vance tried a more conciliatory approach without actually letting the issue lie.

I want to set forth the evaluation of the actions of the Soviet Union in Africa which is being formed in the USA and

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<sup>9</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p. 319.

<sup>10</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, pp. 102-103.

many other countries (not only European). Many people now presume that the Soviet Union sets fires in various regions of Africa instead of preventing those fires in a peaceful way...[R]elating to the fact that détente should be a two way street, and in the context of the situation in Africa, we must determine how we should act so that all these questions do not continue to be a constant source of confrontation between us.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for Vance and his status within the administration, Gromyko used this for another opportunity to condescendingly berate his American counterpart.

You spoke further on about the situation in Africa. I must say that in this case a total and crude distortion of the real situation is taking place. If I, discussing this topic, behaved like some of your high ranking officials, who let loose with simply insulting declarations directed toward the Soviet Union, I would have been forced to use not those, but sharper expressions. By the way, those American officials who make such declarations should study how to communicate with people, especially with representatives of foreign states.<sup>12</sup>

By continually pushing the lie that there was not a single Soviet soldier on the entire African continent, Gromyko seemed to pursue a form of diplomacy predicated on the notion that the 'best defence is a good offence'. He was increasingly aggressive towards and disdainful of his American counterparts, as his thinly-veiled reference to National Security Advisor Brzezinski indicated. The Soviet Foreign Minister criticised American Intelligence insisting that "if we were not sure that our information was authentic, we would not have told you about it. We take great responsibility for what we are saying."<sup>13</sup> When Vance confronted him with evidence of a Cuban presence in Zaire, Gromyko responded that "your sources of information are bad if they present lies as truth... Man

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<sup>11</sup> "Gromyko's Conversation with Vance, 31 May 1978." APRF Documents. *Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

was given his brain in order to analyse information, think, and make realistic conclusions.”<sup>14</sup> As indicated by that less than helpful piece of advice to the American official most interested in maintaining positive relations with the Soviet Union, the pretence of cooperation was gone. Gromyko had just unwittingly given Brzezinski perfect ammunition to convince the President that the Soviets could not be trusted with détente.

### **The Immediate Fallout**

The reasons behind Gromyko’s lie are still hard to explain.<sup>15</sup> However, the importance of this falsehood resides in part with the resulting American turn toward a more confrontational style vis-à-vis the Soviets. Until this point, Vance had gotten his way on most of the decisions to do with the Horn. While Brzezinski had argued for an increased military presence in the region, including sending an aircraft carrier to the Red Sea, Vance’s insistence that the United States remain disengaged carried the day. In addition, Brzezinski argued for linking Soviet presence in Ethiopia to SALT talks, while Vance’s determination to keep the issues separate remained the official policy.<sup>16</sup> However, winning the battle over the handling of the Horn of Africa crisis cost Vance the war. From this juncture, Carter’s inclination was to listen to the more aggressive ideas of his National Security Advisor. In response to a question on how he was able to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Though there are some available documents on the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia, there is still little available on the behind the scenes decisions. Brzezinski (in the author’s interview 28 June 2005) surmised that Gromyko lied because it was easier than telling the truth. In the conferences of the Carter-Brezhnev transcripts, not one of the Soviet participants was able to explain the lie either. Viktor Sukhodrev, Gromyko’s interpreter and aide, said that Gromyko was “a master at stonewalling,” particularly if it was a subject he did not feel like discussing. Transcripts of conference #2, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter however, Brzezinski (intentionally) and Carter (inadvertently) kept undermining the stated policy.

outmanoeuvre the more-experienced Vance, Brzezinski, in a recent interview, asserted, “Well, because the Soviets helped me. You know, the Soviets acted in a way which provided credibility to my point of view and increased the credibility of that second view of détente that I offered.”<sup>17</sup> For Carter, the idea that Brzezinski might be right had begun with testy written exchanges with Brezhnev early in the term and was not complete until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, the meeting with Gromyko proved to be a turning point.

The watershed moment for articulating this shift in Carter’s attitude came in the form of a commencement speech that the President delivered on 7 June at his alma mater, the US Naval Academy. Using language that alternated between respect for the Soviet Union and open hostility, the President demonstrated the duality of his foreign policy and the differing emphases of his main advisors. Vance and Brzezinski had produced drafts of the speech, but the President took it upon himself to write it, and unfortunately for the clarity of his overall message, drew on advice from both. Carter opened with conciliatory language that expressed Vance’s approach.

We must realize that for a very long time our relationship with the Soviet Union will be competitive. That competition is to be constructive if we are successful... We must avoid excessive swings in the public mood in our country—from euphoria when things are going well, to despair when they are not; from an exaggerated sense of compatibility with the Soviet Union, to open expressions of hostility. Détente between our two countries is central to world peace.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Author’s interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

<sup>18</sup> Carter, Jimmy. “United States Naval Academy Address at the Commencement Exercises. June 7th, 1978.” *Public Papers of the Presidents: 1977-1981*.

Then, the tone of his speech changed and he took a much more aggressive stance toward US relations with its superpower counterpart. Speaking in a tone that met Brzezinski's approval, Carter re-committed to confronting the Soviet Union in thinly veiled threats.

We have no desire to link this negotiation for a SALT agreement with other competitive relationships nor to impose other special conditions on the process. In a democratic society, however, where public opinion is an integral factor in the shaping and implementation of foreign policy, we do recognize that tensions, sharp disputes, or threats to peace will complicate the quest for a successful agreement. This is not a matter of our preference but a simple recognition of fact. The Soviet Union can choose either confrontation or cooperation. The United States is adequately prepared to meet either choice.<sup>19</sup>

Though many inside the Beltway believed that the speech involved cutting and pasting the two drafts of the speech, both Vance and Brzezinski insisted that Carter had written it himself. He just didn't believe that these ideas were incompatible.

The Soviets, for their part, took obvious offence to the speech, though they too recognized this corrosion of bilateral relations by the summer of 1978. Indeed, they understood that the impetus for this strain came in large part from Brzezinski, but they refused to acknowledge (as Brzezinski himself attested) that their own behaviour was giving the National Security Advisor more credibility. On 8 June, Brezhnev gave a speech to the Politburo, during which he complained about Carter's attitude.

A serious deterioration and exacerbation of the situation has occurred. And the primary source of the deterioration is the growing aggression of the foreign policy of the Carter government, the continually more sharply anti-Soviet character of the statements of the President himself and of his closest colleagues—in the first instance those of Brzezinski.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "Speech by L.I. Brezhnev to CPSU CC Politburo, 8 June 1978" *CWIHP Bulletin*. Issues 8-9. Winter 1996-97, p. 117.

Both sides hardened their stances, believing in the righteousness of their own positions. To parry charges levelled by the press that Brzezinski was undermining US foreign policy by alienating the USSR and Cuba, Carter began to stand up more assertively for his National Security Advisor.<sup>21</sup>

The international press also took note of this new aggressive line toward the Soviets after the Naval Academy speech. In an interview with the magazine, *Der Spiegel*, on 11 July, the German reporter, Heinz Lohfeldt, grilled the President on linkage or lack of linkage. After noting that critics claim that the administration had no clear focus to its foreign policy, he asked how the United States reconciled its criticism of the Soviets in Africa with its pursuit of a SALT agreement. Carter responded using Brzezinski's language that "the United States seeks a detente that is both broadly defined and fully reciprocal."<sup>22</sup> Still, he insisted that there was no official linkage. However, the reporter challenged that "right now it seems that many Senators consider the linkage a reality and would not be prepared to judge a new SALT agreement on its own merits, but rather in connection with the general Soviet behaviour."<sup>23</sup> Finally, Lohfeldt got to the crux of the matter. "The escalation in the war of words between the Soviet Union and the United States has created the impression that we are witnessing the end of the era of détente and the return of the cold war. In your opinion, is the policy of détente endangered, or has it already failed?"<sup>24</sup> Carter, of course, denied it, but the reality was that détente would never be the same. Later that month, in a 20 July press conference,

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, "The President's Press Conference of 26 June, 1978." *Public Papers of the Presidents: 1977-1981*.

<sup>22</sup> "Interview With the President Question-and-Answer Session With Heinz Lohfeldt of *Der Spiegel* Magazine, July 11th, 1978." *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

the President fielded a question from a reporter who noted that “you seem to be embarked on an eye-for-an-eye diplomacy with the Soviets.”<sup>25</sup> Carter again denied this and emphasised that the United States and the Soviet Union were still discussing SALT and other issues.<sup>26</sup> Yet, it was clear that a line had been crossed in the way the administration discussed relations with the USSR and though Carter still paid lip service to détente, many in Washington now knew it was dead.

Carter’s more forceful stance led to a series of incidents in which the United States completely overreacted to the appearance of Soviet involvement in the Third World, the first of which occurred in late May 1978. At the same time that Brzezinski was preparing for his trip to Beijing, Katangan forces from Angola launched an incursion, their second in the past two years, into the Shaba province of Zaire. Though the United States had reacted calmly to the first, the international atmosphere had changed, particularly when it came to communist influence in Africa. Zaire’s President Mobutu Sese Seko, with the assistance of French, Belgian, Moroccan, and Senegalese troops repelled the invaders quickly. However, the United States saw Angola as supported by Cuba and Cuba by the Soviet Union and therefore jumped to the conclusion that the invasion had Moscow’s backing. The American reaction was to “put our efforts on the Cubans and Soviets. We have to make it costly for them... Put the strategic relationship in jeopardy. Put Cuba’s security and contacts with the rest of the world in jeopardy.”<sup>27</sup> Despite having no evidence to support their claim, American officials

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<sup>25</sup> “The President’s News Conference of 20 July 1978, Washington, DC.” *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski and David Aaron from William E. Odom on State Paper on Zaire: Options After Shaba II” 25 May 1978. Subject File, Meetings SCC, Box 28, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection*, JCPL.

publicly blamed Cuba for supporting the Katangans. Castro denied the accusation, claiming that he had attempted to stop the invasion. Still Carter attempted to make the local conflict about his communist adversaries.

There's no doubt about the fact that Cuba has been involved in the training of Katangan people who did invade. [ ]The fact is that Castro could have done much more, had he genuinely wanted to stop the invasion. He could have interceded with the Katangans themselves. He could certainly have imposed Cuban troops near the border, because they are spread throughout Angola, to impede the invasion. He could have notified the Zambian Government of this fact. He could have notified the Organization of African Unity. He could have notified the world at large that an invasion designed to cross and to disturb an international border was in prospect. And he did not do any of these things. At the present time, Mr. Castro has still not condemned the invasion of Zaire by the Katangan rebels.<sup>28</sup>

This was the first of many situations to which the administration would overreact to the appearance of communist involvement in the Third World, when in fact, there was little basis for such an assumption.

These meetings in late May, the speeches of June and the press interviews of July represented a turning point in the transition from détente to confrontation, but the process was by no means complete. Throughout the early part of Carter's term, Brzezinski had been warning the President that Moscow could not be trusted and was bent on spreading its ideology to the expense of Washington's interests, while Vance emphasised the opportunity to bring the world closer to lasting peace through mutual arms limitations. After Carter felt that the Soviets had proved their insincerity, he was more inclined than previously to listen to the more confrontational opinions of his fiery National Security Advisor. A new SALT agreement remained a top priority for the Administration and

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<sup>28</sup>“The President's News Conference of 14 June 1978.” *The American Presidency Project*.

Carter's advisors continued to search for methods, other than linkage, to oppose Soviet and Cuban intervention in Africa as the President still believed in détente. The difference was that he was now immediately inclined to think the worst when it came to Soviet rhetoric and action.

### **The Horn of Africa and the Unravelling of Détente**

On the Horn, the Ethiopian-Cuban-Soviet effort in the Ogaden had succeeded in pushing Somali troops back across the border in early 1978, though Siad Barre continued to encourage anti-Derg insurgents to keep fighting. Although skirmishes carried on in earnest well into the 1980s, Mengistu could now turn his attention elsewhere. Taking advantage of a weakened and distracted Derg, Eritrean rebels had steadily consolidated their power over most of the territory during 1977. However, the disparate rebel factions could not create a unified strategy before Ethiopia was able to recover. In the spring of 1978, the Derg decided to use its military momentum with its Soviet-Cuban support to crush the Eritrean Rebellion. This put the USSR and Cuba in an awkward position as they had originally supported the Marxist Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) against the Haile Selassie-led Ethiopia. As a compromise, the Soviets and Cubans continued to provide the Derg military support with arms and tactical planning, but initially kept their troops and advisors in the background. Beginning in the summer of 1978 and continuing into 1979, Ethiopian forces retook most of the territory that the EPLF and the ELF had held the previous year. The two insurgent groups remained almost entirely isolated from outside support; unlike Somalia, they refused to turn to the West for aid despite the betrayal by its former allies. Helping to break a military

stalemate during the autumn of 1978, Soviet and Cuban forces joined the front-lines of the fight. In a telling but nevertheless incongruous choice, the Eritrean independence movements refused to condemn them, instead keeping up their denunciation of the United States and Western imperialism.<sup>29</sup>

Adding to its foreign policy difficulties, the Carter administration had yet to agree on a policy course on dealing with the crisis in the Horn. The Soviets and Cubans were still involved in Ethiopia and the Americans were still intent on removing them. The United States continued to face a dilemma on combating the Soviet presence in the region without supporting the aggressive Siad Barre in Somalia and without a viable option in Eritrea. Members of Congress and the press persisted in raising the potential for Soviet dominance in East Africa and the Middle East, pressuring the administration to take firmer action.<sup>30</sup> This all played out in a competition between the State Department and National Security Council staff. Paul Henze, in expressing his disappointment with a *Washington Post* article that claimed the United States was sending arms to Somalia, attributed this erroneous proclamation to a State Department leak.<sup>31</sup> The US government, and particularly the State Department, felt pressure from their Saudi Arabian and Iranian allies to give support to anti-Mengistu forces in Somalia and Eritrea, but Henze argued that this would only solidify the Ethiopian dictator's internal power. The irony here is that the State Department advocated a more aggressive stance within the region than did the National Security Council staff. The latter wanted to confront the Soviets directly on

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<sup>29</sup> Connell, Dan. "Soviets, Cubans Help Ethiopia: Lack of Outside Aid Angers Eritrea Radicals." *The Washington Star*, 7 November 1978. Found in Connell's *Taking on the Superpowers*, pp. 270-272.

<sup>30</sup> This pressure came from conservative Congressmen such as Philip Crane (R, IL), but the *New York Times* raised the issue of pressure from NATO allies as the journalist Drew Middleton tied Soviet involvement in South Arabia and the Horn to cutting off key NATO shipping lanes. See the *Congressional Record*, 11 July, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> "Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 2 June 1978." Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

the issue, as by its very nature, it is a large-picture body. The State Department's larger staff with its greater distribution preferred to deal with the issue on the local level, having many more specialists and basic manpower to deal in more specific regions.

The summer of 1978 brought new challenges. Although keen to obtain arms from Washington, Somali President Siad Barre complicated his cause by continuing an aggressive stance toward Ethiopia. The United States sent a survey team to the region and learned that Somalia was not only supporting and directing the guerrillas in the Ogaden, but it was increasing aid.<sup>32</sup> To build its case in the West, Somalia embarked upon a tremendous diplomatic push in both Washington and London. British Prime Minister James Callaghan informed President Carter that Britain would support supplying "defensive" weapons for Somalia, especially if Siad Barre would sign a non-aggression pact with Kenya.<sup>33</sup> The Americans, however, were less certain. The longer Somalia was able to support the insurgents, they reasoned, the longer Ethiopia could justify its need for Cuban troops. Moreover, the United States perceived overtures for better relations (albeit slight) from Mengistu and did not want to further jeopardise its already perilous relationship with the embattled Marxist regime. Throughout the Ford and Carter administrations, the United States held out hope that relations with Ethiopia could improve. As such, this same need to pacify Mengistu prevented the United States from advocating anything but the status quo in Eritrea. Though the counter-insurgency by the Ethiopian military was particularly brutal, the Carter administration stayed out of the

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<sup>32</sup> "Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 26 June 1978" Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>33</sup> "Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski for David Aaron, 26 June 1978" Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

fray, preferring to concentrate on denying the Soviets a permanent base in Eritrea to replace the one they had lost in Berbera.

Fortunately for the United States, the relative unimportance of Somalia prevented Washington from hastily agreeing to large arms shipments for Siad Barre. As Paul Henze argued in a memo to Brzezinski, the ranking of countries in the Horn in order of intrinsic importance to the United States was Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti. He congratulated the administration for withstanding pressure from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran to aid Siad Barre at the expense of any future relationship with Ethiopia. In addition, he argued that “the dramatization of Somalia as a country which defied and broke with the Soviets and therefore deserved Western support was always overdone...”<sup>34</sup> Despite the hard-line continually advocated by Brzezinski, Henze was able to persuade him not to confuse confronting the Soviets with supporting the Somalis.

Still, the issue of arms for Somalia did not die and at the behest of Vance, the Policy Review Committee met again in late July to discuss the prospect of military aid. Though the State Department refrained from advocating a particular position, those on the National Security Council staff had thought the issue settled long before; i.e. that the United States could not send arms as long as Somalia was continuing to aid the insurgency in the Ogaden.<sup>35</sup> As was becoming commonplace in dealing with the Horn, the participants decided to keep their options open and essentially do nothing, though the lack of available funding for military aid made the decision easier. While this course of action seems with hindsight rather prudent, the inability to set a stronger or more united

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<sup>34</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 27 July 1978” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>35</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 28 July 1978” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

course was readily apparent between the State Department and National Security Council, and no doubt contributed further to the perception that President Carter had an inconsistent foreign policy. Now, no country could know where it stood with Washington.

In September 1978, the administration once again attempted to define its policy on dealing with the Soviet and Cuban presence in Africa, but without any new ideas. At this point, Soviet advisors and Cuban troops were firmly entrenched in Ethiopia, aiding their allies in their fight against Eritrean insurgents. Paul Henze characterised the prevailing American thinking on Africa as nothing more than, “grabbaskets of possible moves and measures that have been put together to create the illusion of bureaucratic neatness.”<sup>36</sup> Henze expressed frustration with the administrative entanglements that delayed American capacity to compete with Moscow’s ability to respond to aid requests quickly.<sup>37</sup> He also wondered whether the administration had not put too much emphasis on the continent as a whole. In a moment of reflection, he suggested “[t]he rhetoric has been too grandiose, our intentions so far-reaching that our performance could never measure up. And we have made the mistake of trying to have a logically consistent policy which applies to the whole continent.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, in language with which Secretary Vance would have agreed, Henze lamented to Brzezinski that “to a fair degree

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<sup>36</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 29 September 1978” Folder: Horn/Special , Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>37</sup> This is a complaint already mentioned frequently by the up and coming neo-conservative groups, led by Ronald Reagan as discussed in chapter IV.

<sup>38</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 29 September 1978” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

this administration has managed to convey the impression that world politics, even our relations with the Soviet Union, revolve around Africa.”<sup>39</sup>

Henze prescribed several measures for dealing with the continent, including downgrading Africa as a policy focal point, confronting only those issues where they had the capacity to exert influence, and extricating themselves from human rights policies that precluded pursuance of American interests. Finally, he recommended that the administration “talk less about Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa and do more to frustrate and oppose them when opportunities develop.”<sup>40</sup> In Henze’s estimation, the most productive policy in countering Cuban and Soviet activity in Africa was the relatively modest CIA effort to publicise the disadvantages of alliance with the Moscow. It is not without irony that Henze professed (and still does) his loyalty to the tactics of Brzezinski and continued disdain for the workings of the State Department, and yet most of his policy remedies were in line with the approach for which Cyrus Vance argued. Though the Soviet and Cuban influence in Ethiopia continued, it is not a coincidence that the subject came up less and less in bilateral conversations between the two superpowers. However, the damage to bilateral relations had already been done.

### **The Disintegration of Détente**

Though negotiations were often strained, SALT represented the one major area where the United States and the Soviet Union still managed to cooperate during the second half of 1978 and into 1979. The failure to come to any kind of accommodation to each other’s point of view in the Horn was mirrored elsewhere. Internal pressures encouraged a

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<sup>39</sup> “Memorandum from Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski 29 September 1978” Folder: Horn/Special, Box 2, *National Security Affairs Staff Material*. JCPL.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviet suppression of its dissidents during the summer of 1978. Likewise, public opinion, the American Congress and Carter's personal beliefs compelled the administration to respond forcefully and use trade prospects to press for improved human rights in the USSR. Next, the American President turned his concentration to rejuvenating stalled peace talks between Israel and Egypt, leaving the Soviets fuming on the sidelines. Finally, the prospect of formalised relations between the United States and China brought a new level of uncertainty to the Soviet Union. All of this discord on other issues put further pressure on the success of SALT while at the same time undermining its chances. These events also demonstrated that President Carter was now clearly choosing Brzezinski's advice over Vance's when it came to dealing with the Soviet Union.

A large part of the American contingent who supported the notion of human rights abroad came not just from the left but from the right of US politics, the precursors to the neo-conservative movement of the 1980's. Led by Senator Jackson of the Democratic party and Ronald Reagan of the Republican party, they attacked the notion of reducing tensions with the Soviet Union while it systematically suppressed, in defiance of the Helsinki Accords, the basic human rights of its citizens. Resentful of the recent American rhetoric (particularly the 7 June speech at the Naval Academy) that Moscow viewed as interference in its internal affairs, Brezhnev cracked down on freshly emboldened dissent within the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> The issue reached new prominence when in the spring and summer of 1978, in several widely publicised trials, Soviet courts

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<sup>41</sup> For more detail on the dissident crackdown, see Raymond Garthoff's, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 673-674.

convicted some of the leading Soviet dissidents to exile, hard labour and even death.<sup>42</sup> Domestic pressures compelled the White House to act. American protests took many forms, most of which chipped away at the very fabric of détente. Though the administration was once again divided on the appropriate response, Secretary Brown and some of Carter's most trusted domestic advisors sided with Brzezinski against Vance in taking a hard-line approach. Carter, too, agreed with his National Security Advisor and the United States retaliated against Soviet actions by postponing the visits of any high-level American officials to Moscow and imposing new restrictions on trade and technology transfers.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, the Soviet Union relented on some human rights issues, including increasing Jewish emigration (a subject dear to the hearts of Jackson and his supporters) and, after a personal request by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), allowing several intellectual dissidents to emigrate.<sup>44</sup> The United States responded favourably and renewed some trade. Still, the dispute exposed the fragility of superpower cooperation. As the two countries marginalised these other components of détente, the need for a SALT agreement became tantamount to saving détente in its entirety.

While SALT negotiations continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1978, President Carter turned his attention to arbitrating a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. From 5 to 17 September, the President and his foreign policy advisors hunkered down at the Presidential retreat at Camp David with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, in order to end the stalemate between the

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<sup>42</sup> Among those convicted of crimes, such as anti-Soviet activities and treason, were Yuri Orlov, Alexandr Ginzburg, Anatoly Scharansky and Anatoly Filatov, many of whom were well-known in the United States.

<sup>43</sup> Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, pp. 322-323.

<sup>44</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 678.

two countries that had existed since the October Yom Kippur War of 1973. The success in ultimately facilitating an agreement (albeit not finalized until 26 March 1979) was one of Carter's finest foreign policy moments, and understandably distracted him and his team from SALT considerations for a brief time. However, the Soviets saw this success as just another example of their marginalisation at the hands of the United States, or indeed as another example that Washington was not living up to its end of détente as it failed to recognize Moscow's need to cooperate on issues of such global importance. As such, the Soviets were in a defensive mood when bilateral negotiations resumed.

Finally, and crucially, an additional hindrance to reaching an agreement on SALT II arose out of yet another difference of opinion between Brzezinski and Vance, this time on how and when to recognise and open formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. While both men favoured the move, they disagreed on the timing. Vance and the State Department did not want to make the Soviets more defensive than they already were and therefore hoped to conclude a SALT agreement before formal recognition of China. Brzezinski, on the other hand, believed that 'the China Card' could be used to give the United States leverage in its bargaining with the Soviet Union over SALT.<sup>45</sup> The National Security Advisor had received a warm welcome during his visit to Beijing the previous spring, which had left him as the man in the driver's seat for the formulation of American policy toward China. He then managed to undermine the Secretary of State by taking advantage of the latter's absence. The President had asked Vance to fly to the Middle East in mid-December to pressure Egypt and Israel to conclude a peace treaty by the 17 December deadline that had been agreed upon at Camp

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<sup>45</sup> As mentioned in Chapter IV, the desire to speed up the recognition of China, was directly a response to the failure to successfully link Soviet action in the Horn to SALT progress.

David. While he was there, Brzezinski, back in Washington, reacted quickly to Chinese overtures to solidify the day, 15 December 1978, of the announcement of the creation of formal diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing. In his memoirs, Vance called the news “a shock” and accused Brzezinski of “black[ing] Christopher and Holbrooke out of the decision making for about six hours, and they had been unable to inform me of what was taking place.”<sup>46</sup> Brzezinski, in his memoirs, described the way he deliberately surprised Dobrynin in front of the press with the news, recalling that the Soviet Ambassador’s “face turned kind of gray and his jaw dropped.”<sup>47</sup> Once again, the President had sided with Brzezinski to the detriment of Vance and to détente.

This new Sino-American rapprochement had immediate consequences on Soviet-American relations due to the never ending saga of the Cold War in southeast Asia. Interactions between China and Vietnam were increasingly strained throughout 1978 and China allied itself with Pol Pot’s regime in Kampuchea (present-day Cambodia). As the United States chose its burgeoning relationship with China over healing its wounds with Vietnam, Hanoi had no choice but to look to Moscow, ultimately signing a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union on 3 November 1978. This great power manoeuvring occurred as Vietnam and Kampuchea were engaged in a prolonged border conflict. Then, on 25 December, Vietnam invaded its neighbour, taking Phnom Penh by 7 January 1979. Hanoi’s reasons for the invasion were not necessarily altruistic and the Soviet role in the decision is still unknown. Indeed, the invasion was condemned by much of the world, but Vietnam must be credited with toppling the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. This was too much for the Chinese, however. In late February 1979, China invaded the

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<sup>46</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 118. Warren Christopher and Richard Holbrooke were Vance’s deputies in the State Department.

<sup>47</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 232.

Soviet ally Vietnam to counter the Vietnamese invasion of Chinese ally Kampuchea. Coming just after the newly established friendship between Washington and Beijing, Moscow was not immediately inclined to negotiate kindly with the United States on SALT, wary of its role in the conflict.

These various instances of misunderstanding and discord between the United States and the Soviet Union would not, individually, have been enough to derail SALT or détente. Accumulatively though, they represented the total inability of the superpowers to cooperate with each other, making evident the unfulfilled promise of détente. The failure of Washington and Moscow to even try to work together on the Horn had ended the idea that détente could lead to cooperation in the Third World. Also, it had essentially completed Carter's switch from Vance's point of view to Brzezinski's approach in dealing with the Soviet Union. As such, the National Security Advisor got his way on the use of the human rights issue and American formal recognition of China, both of which, unlike the Horn of Africa, were areas on which Moscow *was* vulnerable. With the pretence of cooperation all but gone, subsequent squabbles could only have had the effect of damaging any attempt to reach an agreement on SALT, the only apparent remnant of superpower détente.

### **The Fall of SALT II**

Though an agreement on strategic arms limitations would ultimately be signed, the delays in coming to a deal, combined with the strains during negotiations, ensured that it would come too late for the Senate to ratify SALT II. Initially, the President worked quite closely with his Secretary of State on pursuing an agreement. This changed after the

tense disagreements over the Soviet presence in Ethiopia during that meeting between Carter and Gromyko. Indeed, the later SALT negotiations, though carried out by Vance, demonstrated that the National Security Advisor now commanded the President's ear far more than the Secretary of State. Ultimately, as Brzezinski had predicted in what can only be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy, the mood of the country and among lawmakers was increasingly hostile to détente and leaning toward confrontation instead of conciliation with the Soviet Union.

The actual negotiations took far longer than either side had predicted. Upon first entering office, in the spring of 1977, Carter had hoped to make rapid progress on SALT II and quickly proposed far more radical reductions than were agreed to at Vladivostok by Gerald Ford. He was surprised and forced to backtrack when the Soviets balked at these more far-reaching measures. Negotiations were set back once again later in 1977 as the United States continually brought up issues of human rights and Soviet intervention in the Third World. Convinced that the Soviet Union ultimately needed the arms talks more than themselves, the Americans continued their efforts to moderate Moscow's behaviour, particularly in the Horn of Africa, by linking it to arms talks. As discussed in the previous chapter, Vance and Brzezinski had argued in some highly contentious meetings on this concept of linkage, with Vance rejecting the concept and Brzezinski promoting it. Though Carter agreed with the Secretary of State that the official policy should avoid suggestions of linkage, the President copied the language of his National Security Advisor by asserting that it was the Soviets who were imposing linkage on them. Yet, once Carter felt the Soviets had been duplicitous in their dealings with him over the

Horn crisis, Carter sided more and more with Brzezinski in his battles with Vance, a reversal which soon spilled over to issues outside of Africa.

A week after the United States had announced that it would formally recognize China, Vance met Gromyko in Geneva to try to hammer out some of the remaining differences over SALT. During the discussions, Brzezinski again scored an important victory over his State Department rival, demonstrating conclusively that he was the man with the President's ear. The issue dealt with the encryption of ICBM tests. During negotiations, Vance and Gromyko had agreed to allow encryption under certain circumstances. Back in Washington, this proved unacceptable to CIA director Stansfield Turner who sought a complete ban, though he could live with the provision if the Soviets would promise not to repeat the encryption of a particular test the previous July. Turner argued that Vance should raise the matter the next day and get Gromyko to agree that use of such technology would be illegal under SALT II. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, however, warned that it would be fruitless to concentrate on a single example, making the rule easy to circumvent. Brzezinski, as a compromise, decided that Vance should confront Gromyko with the American perception that the July test was illegal, and ensure that the Soviet foreign minister not contradict this. Carter authorised this strategy, but when Brzezinski informed Vance of the change, the Secretary of State was livid and attempted in vain to get the President to change his mind. Gromyko responded to this new surprise with one of his own, demanding settlement of several

outstanding problems before they proceeded. The prospect of an agreement that had seemed so hopeful only hours before was now set back by new contentious issues.<sup>48</sup>

The early part of 1979 saw little progress on SALT as the two superpowers found themselves preoccupied with disagreements over China, Vietnam, Yemen and Iran, described elsewhere in this chapter. By late spring, however, Vance and Dobrynin were able to meet regularly and ultimately hammer out their remaining differences. The United States and Soviet Union finally signed the SALT II agreement in Vienna in June 1979 on the occasion of the first and only summit between Carter and Brezhnev. Despite the happy circumstances, the meeting between the two leaders was awkward and strained. The Soviet premier defended Moscow's support of revolutionary regimes in newly emerging countries emphasising that "revolutionary changes occur as a result of conditions within a national territory, and it would only be self-deception to ascribe such changes to 'Moscow intrigue'."<sup>49</sup> When the American President attempted to present his own agenda, Brezhnev impatiently interrupted Carter on a number of occasions. However, he was right to fear that the treaty for which he and the Politburo had worked so hard would be threatened by Brzezinski's insistence that the Soviet Union fomented revolution abroad. The National Security Advisor only needed to point to Angola and Ethiopia to make his point.

Ultimately, the delays in reaching an agreement doomed the treaty. Vance immediately faced tough questioning in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings in July 1979, though the Democratic members gave him plenty of opportunity to argue

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<sup>48</sup> For more on the American perceptions of SALT II talks, see Strobe Talbot *End Game: the Inside Story of SALT II*. (Harper and Row, London: 1979). This specific incident is described in detail on pages 240-244.

<sup>49</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev and Jimmy Carter, 16 June 1979, Vienna Austria." *Carter-Brezhnev Project*. NSA.

his case. In the staff memorandum for the hearings, the authors devoted a large section to the Soviet Union's Third World policy and the concept of 'linkage.' There were more questions under this heading than any other, many addressing whether there were options other than SALT to convince the Soviets to exercise restraint in Africa and the Middle East. The queries included "Does the Soviet effort to reach SALT agreements reflect a belief that it can gain a freer hand in the Third World or in Europe by engaging the U.S. in negotiations aimed at reducing tensions elsewhere?" to which Vance penned a handwritten 'no' on his copy of the memo. In an intelligent addition, the committee tried to see the other side, enquiring, "From the Soviet perspective, do U.S. actions in the Middle East [] appear in the same competitive light as theirs do to us?" Vance apparently liked this question as he penned an emphatic 'yes'.<sup>50</sup> The committee voted to send the treaty to the full Senate, but the questions its members raised demonstrated that the concept of linkage was very much on their minds and thereby affirming Brzezinski's arguments.

In response to a recent question as to whether SALT was already dead by the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Brzezinski hedged.

I think it was dying. It was dying, but once we normalized relations with the Chinese, the Russians all of the sudden became more interested in having it. And there was a brief period of time when we looked as if we might get it. Over here is a picture of us signing SALT. And I notice the only person standing there and grinning, it's me. Because, I thought the whole thing was a little bit of a farce. And, it's pretty late by then. It's pretty late. If we had gotten SALT a year earlier, we'd have had a chance.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Staff Memorandum: SALT Hearing, 10 July 1979." United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Including Vance's handwritten notes. *The Cyrus Vance and Grace Sloan Vance Papers*. Manuscripts and Archives Division, Yale University Library. New Haven, CT.

<sup>51</sup> Author's interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

Even Vance admitted that the political storm created by the revelation of a Soviet brigade in Cuba “delayed Senate consideration of the treaty long enough for it to be overtaken and shelved as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.”<sup>52</sup> Although the Iranian hostage situation would set the hearings back even further in November 1979, Vance saw Afghanistan as the catalyst for failure, a tragic “turning point” in U.S.-Soviet relations.<sup>53</sup> He could no longer defend his position of putting the reduction of superpower tensions as the administration’s top priority. Until then, he had hoped he could regain some sway with the President. However, by the time the President submitted the agreement to the Senate for ratification, the mood of the Congress was highly sceptical of détente and its chances of passing were already slim.<sup>54</sup> Vance would never again be the guiding mind of American foreign policy, culminating with his resignation in late April 1979 after his point of view was completely disregarded in the disastrous decision to attempt a rescue of the hostages in Iran.

### **A Chain Reaction**

Several conflicts along the perimeter of the Indian Ocean had caused Brzezinski to argue that the United States was facing what he coined an “arc of crisis.”

An arc of crisis stretches along the shores of the Indian Ocean, with fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political chaos could well be

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<sup>52</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, p. 358.

<sup>53</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, p. 384.

<sup>54</sup> The chance of SALT II passing the Senate during the summer of 1979 is still debated. At the second conference of *the Carter-Brezhnev Project*, “SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust,” Marshall Shulman, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Soviet Affairs, stated that he believed it already to be too late, while Vance thought there was still a good chance. Even the members of the Congressional Liaison Staff of the NSC thought it still possible after the Soviet Brigade in Cuba debacle, while their boss Brzezinski clearly thought it too late. See Transcripts pp. 340-345.

filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries.<sup>55</sup>

The Horn of Africa was the first piece of the arc, but subsequent upheavals in Yemen, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan left the United States feeling as if it were trying unsuccessfully to stabilize a time-bomb. In particular, the Cold War implications of the war between the two Yemens, the Iranian revolution and finally the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused powerful reactions in Washington. The Carter administration found itself responding to these events out of its control, part of a chain reaction that permanently altered its relations with Moscow and, in the case of the latter two, contributed heavily to the perception of weakness that helped undermine Carter's re-election prospects.

In February 1979, a couple of events in the Middle East played a factor in some repositioning of the global world order. First, there was a flare-up on the Arabian Peninsula between North and South Yemen, potentially threatening American interests in Saudi Arabia. The North Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh requested assistance from the United States, arguing that South Yemen was supported by the Soviet Union, a contention that was true with regard to military aid, but probably not in the case of the actual incursions. Carter reacted quickly and channelled a massive arms transfer through the Saudis to North Yemen, though the Arab League and the Soviets arranged a cease-fire before the arms even got there. In addition, he authorised the visit of an aircraft carrier to the region in a show of support for North Yemen.<sup>56</sup> This whole event was illustrative of the new assertiveness on the part of the administration, though it was

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<sup>55</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski quoted in "The Crescent of Crisis" *TIME* 15 Jan. 1979.

<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that Brzezinski had advocated this strategy for the Horn, but it was rejected at that time.

ultimately completely unnecessary.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately for Carter, he could not seem to judge when to respond forcefully and when to downplay an event that was out of his control.

For the administration, the most disastrous piece of Brzezinski's arc of crisis was the revolution and subsequent American hostage crisis in Iran. In February 1979, Islamists ousted the Shah of Iran, and the United States lost a key ally in the region. Iran had been a major recipient of American arms since the 1960s and President Carter, in particular, had established close personal ties with the Shah. This was one crisis, however, that United States could not place the blame on the shoulders of the Soviet Union. Though Moscow was pleased that Washington had lost an important ally, there was little chance that the new leaders in Tehran would reach out to the atheistic communists. Still, the upheaval in Iran attached itself firmly to the Cold War as it further contributed to the impression of American helplessness in managing world events, culminating with Iranian students taking sixty-six American hostages in Tehran on 4 November 1979. More than the struggling economy or the downfall of détente, the hostage crisis led to Carter's certain defeat and therefore the rise of Ronald Reagan.

The Americans' sense of impotence and betrayal, even within the State Department, over Soviet conduct in the Third World continued to cause stronger reactions to future events, leading eventually to the withdrawal of SALT II from the Senate. Not long after the Vienna summit, the United States, in a complete policy debacle, 'discovered' the existence of a Soviet brigade in Cuba. This unit of Soviet troops had in fact been on the island since the early 1960's with American knowledge.

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<sup>57</sup> For more on this and reference to CIA attempts to undermine North Yemen, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 329.

However, in response to pointed criticism from the press and the pressure from some influential senators seeking re-election, the administration reacted vigorously, but completely out of proportion to the news.<sup>58</sup>

Beginning with a daily press briefing by Under-Secretary of State for Public Affairs Hodding Carter, on 31 August 1979, the State Department immediately condemned the presence of the troops. In an awkward press conference six days later, the Secretary of State, amidst fielding questions addressing his own loss of power within the administration, said of dealing with the Soviets on the matter that, "I will not be satisfied with the maintenance of the status quo."<sup>59</sup> In his memoirs, Vance admitted that the language he had used came across as stronger than he had intended.<sup>60</sup> However, Carter reiterated the comment himself in an address to the nation two days after that.<sup>61</sup> This language implied that the United States intended to take steps to remove the brigade, an action it had no intention of pursuing. In an apparent about-face, the President once again addressed the nation on 1 October, this time attempting to down-play the brigade's importance in relation to SALT. While still trying to appear strong against the Soviets, Carter nevertheless urged the Senate to ratify SALT II.<sup>62</sup> The message he sent was rather mixed. First, he accused the Soviet Union of essentially occupying and using Cuba to further its own ends.

In every international dispute, on every international issue,  
the Cuban regime automatically follows the Soviet line.

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<sup>58</sup> For an inside account of the American response to the crisis, see David Newsom's *The Soviet Brigade in Cuba*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN: 1987).

<sup>59</sup> "Press Conference with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, 5 Sept 1979" found in Newsom, *The Soviet Brigade in Cuba*. Appendix B, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, p. 362.

<sup>61</sup> Carter, Jimmy. "Soviet Combat Troops in Cuba Remarks to Reporters, 7 September 1979" *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>62</sup> Carter, Jimmy. "Peace and National Security Address to the Nation on Soviet Combat Troops in Cuba and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, 1 October 1979." *The American Presidency Project*.

The Soviet brigade is a manifestation of Moscow's dominance of Cuba. It raises the level of that dominance, and it raises the level of responsibility that the Soviet Union must take for escalating Cuban military actions abroad.<sup>63</sup>

Then, he went on to say that he was expanding American military manoeuvres in the area, increasing surveillance of Cuba and establishing a Caribbean task force. Yet, after taking such a hard-line against the Soviet Union, he “concluded that the brigade issue is certainly no reason for a return to the cold war.”<sup>64</sup> Carter was walking a very fine line and essentially failing to pull it off. He sincerely believed in both confrontation and arms control and the two did not have to be mutually exclusive. However, the entire debacle extended the arms limitation debate in the Senate even longer. It also further exasperated the Kremlin which remained frustrated with the Americans’ apparent inconsistency.<sup>65</sup> The President may have been better off had he acknowledged the failure of détente, while advocating arms control talks for their own sake.

National Security Council member Robert Pastor recalled that Vance and Brzezinski had once again advocated two divergent approaches for dealing with the crisis, though both with a mind to preserving SALT. Brzezinski suggested that Carter play the issue of the Brigade up and show resolve to demonstrate that the Soviets would have no choice but to comply with any agreement between the two countries. Vance, on the other hand, favoured down-playing the controversy to convey its relative

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> This is well illustrated in an exchange of letters between Carter and Brezhnev through the Hotline in late September. See, “CPSU CC Politburo Decision with Brezhnev-Carter Hotline Correspondence 27 September 1979” Virtual Archive *CWIHP*, [www.wilsoncenter.org](http://www.wilsoncenter.org).

unimportance. Carter went back and forth between the two views because both had supporters in the Senate, ultimately choosing to side with Vance.<sup>66</sup>

Brzezinski believed that the indecisive reaction to the crisis in the Horn left the administration in a weakened position vis-à-vis the Senate and public opinion. This he felt led to panic and over-reaction to the news of the Soviet Brigade in Cuba.

[T]he brigade was a good example of what happens when you're too weak. And then all of the sudden, you wake up from your daydreaming and you realize things aren't the way you were dreaming because the brigade was largely a crisis created by the State Department out of fear that the Senate would bang us up.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the fact that Brzezinski blamed the fiasco on the State Department, he was the one who ordered the intelligence review that started the mess.<sup>68</sup> Vance believed differently, though he still tied the reaction to events on the Horn. He recalled that "because of Cuban military involvement in Angola and Ethiopia and the Mig-23 flareup of late 1978, feelings about Cuba and its relations with the Soviet Union ran high in the administration."<sup>69</sup> This point of view bears serious consideration given that Cuba still invokes a passionate response in the United States far after the end of the Cold War. In any case, the Soviet brigade in Cuba fiasco did cause a switch in the public's opinion of SALT as more Americans favoured the ratification of the treaty rather than opposed it in July 1979 with the reverse being true in September of that year.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> "The Collapse of Détente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan." *The Carter-Brezhnev Project Transcripts*. 22-24 October 1992, Pocantico Hills, New York, pp. 144-145.

<sup>67</sup> Author's interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

<sup>68</sup> Though Senators Richard Stone (D-FL) and Frank Church (D-ID) were the ones who publicly amplified the rhetoric.

<sup>69</sup> Vance. *Hard Choices*, p. 358.

<sup>70</sup> In response to the question, "In June of 1979, President Carter for the U.S. and President Brezhnev for Russia signed a new SALT treaty. The treaty, which would last until 1985, limits each country to a

The final straw that broke the back of SALT was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The President had to pull the treaty from the Senate as it never would have passed and would have just been another blow to a seriously weakened administration. Coming on the heels of the Iranian Revolution and subsequent taking of American hostages, the President needed to do something to inject some vigour into his foreign policy especially with the election less than a year away. For Brzezinski, SALT had been dead for a long time, and therefore Afghanistan was an example of further State Department over-reaction.

It was largely a good example of what happens with people who are timid, then overreact. Actually, the sanctions after Afghanistan, which actually I expected to, which I reacted to by giving Carter a memo saying, “we now have a chance to give the Soviets their Vietnam.” And we did. But, I wasn’t in favour of all of these massive public sanctions. The State Department came in with a list of 32 sanctions! All sorts of areas. Far more than anything I was advocating.<sup>71</sup>

This huge response by the State Department was borne out by Vance’s categorisation of Afghanistan as a “turning point” but it certainly met with the President’s approval. Vance recalled that Carter was “troubled and angered” by the invasion and that “Afghanistan was unquestionably a severe setback to the policy I advocated.”<sup>72</sup> From the American perspective, the Soviets seemed to establishing a systematic pattern of intervention from Angola to Ethiopia to Afghanistan. Having tried and failed to use

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maximum of 2,250 long-range nuclear missiles and bombers. As you know, there’s a good deal of controversy about this proposed treaty. Do you think the U.S. Senate should vote for this new SALT treaty or against it. In July 1979, 31% said they were for ratification, 29% against it, 21% had mixed feelings, and 19% did not know. In September 1979, 30% were for it, 35% against it, 15% had mixed feelings, and 17% did not know. Poll found in Tom W. Smith, “The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism” p. 288.

<sup>71</sup> Author’s interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski. 28 June 2005. Washington D.C.

<sup>72</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 394.

détente to influence Soviet actions in the Horn, the United States knew that it wouldn't work in Afghanistan either. Therefore, in American minds, détente was dead.

## **Conclusion**

Though superpower relations had become increasingly strained during the first year and a half of Carter's term, the famously indecisive President had not yet made up his mind on the direction of American foreign policy toward its biggest rival. Despite raising the issue of human rights within the Soviet Union and trying to influence Soviet activity in the Third World, Carter's number one priority was a new agreement on arms reduction, not fully realising that the criticism of the Soviet Union would undermine his ability to do business with Moscow. These were separate issues for the inexperienced President. Throughout this period, Carter's two main advisors were giving him conflicting advice. Secretary of State Vance counselled that the United States should treat local conflict separately from its larger geopolitical struggles. On the other hand, National Security Advisor Brzezinski maintained that the world must be viewed as a whole and if the Soviets were involved, then the United States must see a conflict in relation to its dealings with its rival. Carter's initial inclination was to listen to the more measured arguments of the vastly experienced Secretary of State. However, Brzezinski continually reminded Carter that the Soviets were not abiding by what the United States saw as the rules of détente and therefore could not be trusted. Ultimately, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's blatant lie about his country's involvement in the Horn of Africa conflict helped convince the President that his National Security Advisor had the better instincts when it came to depending on the Soviets to live up to their promises.

After that fateful meeting of late May 1978, both Carter's rhetoric, as well as his actions, took a harder line toward the USSR. The United States tried to use SALT negotiations to score points against the Soviets, but in doing so undermined any potential for reaching an early agreement. Though members of the administration always denied using 'linkage' to SALT as a motivational tool for the USSR, that's essentially what they did, especially in regards to Soviet involvement in the Horn. This created a succession of disputes that continually damaged SALT negotiations, delaying an accord until the summer of 1979, two years later than either side had expected. When Carter and Brezhnev finally met to sign the agreement, tensions were so bad that they overrode the joy of the moment. In this climate, the Washington establishment completely overreacted to the non-news of a Soviet brigade in Cuba, perpetuating the cycle of mistrust established between the two countries and ensuring that the Senate further delayed consideration of SALT II. Ultimately, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made the point moot for the United States. Washington could no longer even consider making a deal with a power it felt it couldn't trust.

Brzezinski liked to say that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden."<sup>73</sup>

With this statement, he had meant to place the blame squarely on Moscow's shoulders. Yet, if it was true, it was the United States who created the linkage. Despite American frustration at Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Ethiopia-Somalia war, SALT II could perhaps have survived that particular crisis without the debacle of the Soviet Brigade in Cuba, the loss of international prestige over the Iranian revolution, and the Soviet direct military intervention in Afghanistan. However, these later events took on greater magnitude because they followed the crisis in the Horn and may not have been as

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<sup>73</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Power and Principle*, p.189.

important without the earlier dispute. As such, the crisis affected not only the balance of power within the administration, but also public and Congressional opinion over the direction of Soviet-American relations. Thus, the quote is not entirely absurd, as it did set off a chain of events that ultimately led to the renewed confrontation. Still, it is equally conceivable that Brzezinski helped to make the statement true. By continually raising the issue with the President as well as the press, he kept the issue alive and, crucially, connected to the arms talks.

Some Soviet policy makers began to believe that each successive disagreement between Washington and Moscow, but particularly the issue of the Soviet brigade in Cuba, was part of a deliberate plan on the part of hard-liners to sabotage SALT II.<sup>74</sup> Others such as Dobrynin and Viktor Kompletov, head of the U.S. Department at the Soviet Foreign Ministry, saw the debacle over the Soviet brigade in Cuba as the moment they knew that SALT would never be ratified.<sup>75</sup> This was not because they thought that the President would abandon it after the issue, but that they believed that the administration had lost control over the situation and that the anti-SALT hardliners were now manipulating American foreign policy. This was not entirely true. Brzezinski was winning the debates in the administration but he was not necessarily anti-SALT. Washington, unlike its Soviet counterpart, did have to contend with public opinion and at this point, it was not supportive of any kind of accommodation with Moscow.

Unfortunately for President Carter, he did not see early enough that having to mediate between two strong personalities with opposing ideologies would put incredible strains on his foreign policy. By the end of the term, Brzezinski's fear that the perception

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<sup>74</sup> Aleksander Bessmertnykh, a counsellor in the Soviet embassy in Washington D.C. remarked on this at the first conference of the Carter-Brezhnev Project. See transcripts, p. 150.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

of weakness would bring down the Carter administration was proven correct. However, it need not have been true had a different course been taken in response to Soviet activity in the Horn. The strains on the SALT talks brought about by focussing on issues brought up by the United States, such as the Soviets in Africa and human rights, changed the dynamics of superpower relations. The length of time it took to agree on a final version doomed the treaty as it was overtaken by other issues. By the time the Soviets intervened in Afghanistan, bilateral relations were already beyond salvaging. This is not to say that the Moscow wouldn't have interceded in its neighbour's affairs anyway, but it had little to lose vis-à-vis superpower relations at that point.

The mood of the country and its representatives in the Senate were already moving toward a more confrontational style with the Soviet Union. Ronald Reagan and the neo-conservative revolution were by this time a force with which to be reckoned and the administration, including the State Department, was, in part, following the shift. Still, there is something to Brzezinski's idea of a cycle of reaction and over-reaction. This is the result of a foreign policy that was open and learning on its way. This could have been a good thing. Consistency in foreign policy is not useful when the decisions are based on dogmatic ideology or are just consistently bad. Though Carter did not fall into that trap, he learned the wrong lessons as he went along. Nonetheless, the main struggle for the Carter administration was that it found itself continually reacting to events without a clear guiding strategy. Both Vance and Brzezinski had compelling, albeit different, visions for the way American foreign policy should be conducted. Carter's relative inexperience in foreign policy, however, was ultimately the deciding factor. The President had thought that disagreements between his advisors could have been healthy. Indeed, they could

have been, but only if Carter had already held his own firm beliefs on the proper direction for policy. He had admirable but vague notions of bringing morality back into the fold after the excesses of his predecessors. Unfortunately, he didn't foresee the potential contradictions this could pose and the United States returned to the Cold War anew.

## Conclusion

There was perhaps a brief window of time during which the United States had the opportunity to abandon the concept of containment and form a new approach to waging the Cold War. This particularly could have benefited the Third World, where superpower conflict caused the most damage and its ill effects are today evident in the poverty, militarization and political failure of many of the affected countries. The United States had nothing to gain by supporting a murderous dictator who had invaded another country and quite a bit to lose. The administration would have had nothing to do with the Somali dictator if he had not sold himself as a barrier to Soviet domination of the Red Sea. On the other hand, Brzezinski to this day believes that the United States was not aggressive enough. Neither the abandonment of containment nor physical intervention was likely under the circumstances. Given the pervasiveness of American ideology, the personalities of his advisors, the perception of Soviet motives, the pressure from public opinion, and the undermining of his personal conviction, President Carter followed the only path available. Unfortunately for him, the American public's perception that he was weak on foreign policy directly led to Carter's electoral defeat to Ronald Reagan and his anti-communist containment rhetoric. A chain of events beginning with the handling of the predicament on the Horn contributed to this perception and perhaps most importantly attached itself to SALT, ensuring that the Senate would never ratify the agreement.

The repercussions of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were that the United States virtually ceased to even pretend to support détente. President Carter's reaction was

vehement, calling the event “the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War.”<sup>1</sup> Cyrus Vance and the State Department responded with numerous sanctions on the Soviet Union that included a grain embargo and ultimately an American boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Ironically, Brzezinski did not react as strongly as those in the administration who had been the biggest proponents of détente, most likely because he had less faith in the process and therefore did not feel the betrayal quite as much.<sup>2</sup> Still, he was one of the main instigators of the Carter Doctrine that reasserted American military presence in the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and created a new security framework for the region.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Soviet-American relations in the final year of Carter’s term were characterised by renewed confrontation. The situation of the American Hostages in Iran overshadowed all other foreign policy considerations during 1980, but nonetheless, this shift back toward the Cold War was a blatant one. Though disagreement over a rescue mission to Tehran was the impetus for Vance’s resignation as Secretary of State, the disappointment and increasingly marginalised influence that had occurred as a result of superpower relations had pushed him to the brink of such a decision before the failed rescue mission.

The struggles of the Carter Administration were domestic as much as international, but the failure of détente weighed heavily on the election campaign of 1980. Ronald Reagan, the amiable actor turned politician, who had once been considered radical in his conservatism, appealed to a populous that was increasingly mistrustful of

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Carter. “Remarks at a White House Briefing for Members of Congress, January 8th, 1980.” *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>2</sup> In the author’s interview with Brzezinski, he recalled his reaction to the long list of sanctions on the Soviet Union proposed by the State Department, “But Cyrus by then were in such a frenzy that they came out with this HUGE list of sanctions and I just sat there when he was reading them and I was saying ‘fine, accept, check it off, check it off, and I wasn’t going to stop him, but (laughing) I was opposed to at least two thirds of them.” 28 June 2005, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Carter articulated his doctrine in his final State of the Union Address on 23 January 1980, *the American Presidency Project*. Also, Brzezinski details the strategy in an entire chapter in his memoirs, *Power and Principle*, pp. 426-469.

the Soviet Union. Though the election was very much a referendum on Jimmy Carter and the helplessness associated with the hostages in Tehran, the American people knew that they were voting in a fervent anti-Soviet proponent of containment. The foreign policy of the Carter administration's first three years was roughly a continuation of the policies pursued by Nixon and Ford, but his final was a precursor to the hard-line policies of Reagan's first term. However, his firmer stance came too late to overcome the perception of weakness.

It was the Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa that was the catalyst for Carter's conversion from the cooperation of the Nixon-Ford years to the containment of the Reagan years. Certainly, it is not without irony that such a marginal conflict served to change the course of the foreign policy of the world's most powerful country. Yet, given the rigidity of the American and Soviet mindsets, the next Third World crisis after Angola was likely to play this role, particularly if Washington felt it could not achieve its desired outcome on the ground. The conflict in the Horn also occurred just as the United States was putting the memory of the failure of Vietnam behind it. Though not ready to commit troops to another Third World conflict, moving beyond that painful reminder of the limits of American power meant that the United States was once again eager to prove its might. As such, the country was ripe to reassert itself in the diplomatic, economic, cultural and scientific arenas, areas where the United States remained confident. Acknowledging the Soviet Union as an equal power simply clashed with the American psyche.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was about to learn the lesson that the United States had learned in Vietnam. Simply a large-scale military intervention in a country

whose people do not want to be ruled by an outside power and feel they have nothing to lose, is an impossible task. Afghanistan taught this lesson most brutally, but there were already hints of the follies of such intervention in Ethiopia. Moscow could not control Mengistu, who, at heart, was a very disciplined thug. Although the dictator attempted some socialist reform, it was to disastrous effect and Ethiopia essentially proved to be a huge drain on Soviet resources as Addis Ababa requested more and more arms to deal with the continuing rebellion in Eritrea. These Soviet commitments abroad put a huge burden on its economy and the high death tolls in Afghanistan created a weary populace. This Soviet overstretch ultimately brought Moscow to a point where change could no longer be avoided, and after the deaths of Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko the Politburo looked to Mikhail Gorbachev, the first Soviet premier to have been born after the revolution, to reform the decaying institutions of power.

For the countries of the Horn, the war in the Ogaden had calamitous effects. In Somalia, Siad Barre's failed gamble undermined his authority and though he stayed another decade as ruler, he spent it trying to hold onto power rather than attempting to build a nation. After his fall in 1991, Somalia became a failed state, fracturing into several areas ruled by warlords, roaming bandits and even pirates cruising the long coastline. A UN peacekeeping mission met with such violence in 1993 that US President Bill Clinton withdrew American troops after nineteen of them died in a battle immortalised in the 2001 film *Black Hawk Down*. After a decade of chaos, with the nominal government unable to control Mogadishu, Islamic insurgents finally established order in the capital and set about establishing strict rule by Islamic courts that forbade even the watching of the 2006 Soccer World Cup. Despite bringing a semblance of order

to the region, the harshness of their rule and accusations of harbouring Al Qaeda operatives has brought the condemnation of the international community. In a sad twist of irony, the Somali-Ethiopian conflict came full circle, when in December 2006, the United States provided air cover for Ethiopian troops invading Somalia to provide assistance to the exiled government's return to Mogadishu.

In Ethiopia, the Soviet and Cuban intervention succeeded not only in expelling Somalia from the Ogaden, but also in propping up the brutal rule of Haile Mariam Mengistu. The Ethiopian dictator embarked on a program of forced agricultural collectivisation that, along with a serious drought, brought about the famous famines of the mid-1980's that provoked western outcry and inspired Bob Geldof's Live Aid. The Soviet Union, mired down in Afghanistan, could not come close to matching the aid that poured in from the West, creating an embarrassing situation for Moscow. Mengistu's government, still fighting Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgents in the North, allocated the aid as it saw fit, often ignoring the hardest hit areas. Moscow, however, continued to send millions of dollars worth of arms shipments to the vile dictator until 1990. As Mengistu's hold on power finally eroded, the EPLF and TPLF joined together to oust him from power and march into Addis Ababa in 1991. In what seemed a hopeful new era, Meles Zenawi of the TPLF sought the assistance of Isaias Afewerki of the EPLF to overthrow Mengistu and in exchange, Zenawi, the new leader of Ethiopia, granted Eritrea independence in 1992. Unfortunately, the former allies are now enemies, fighting over a disputed border, while all of the affected countries remain among the world's most impoverished.

The Soviet intervention in the Horn and its role in the failure of détente raise two important questions. First, how could a marginal conflict in the Third World have had such an impact on superpower relations? Second, what does the conflict in the Horn teach us about the future of great power relations, or more specifically, of future great power détente?

When Nixon and Kissinger and Brezhnev and Gromyko embarked on a policy of détente between their countries, both sides entered negotiations in good faith with legitimate reasons for seeking accommodation with the other superpower. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet had been the two clearly dominant powers in the world and the Cold War had really represented several different realms of competition between the two in which they tried to prove their superiority. They competed in the traditional areas of sport and culture, but more dangerously in the areas of technology, military might, European alliances, and finally the hearts and minds of the Third World. Of these last four, Nixon and Brezhnev were able to accommodate each other on three of them. The countries of Europe had taken it upon themselves to establish their own East-West détente and essentially legitimize the two European blocs, rendering the Soviet-American competition for their loyalties a finished contest. Moscow was behind in the technology realm, despite some victories in the space race, but Washington felt it could share some of its advances in this area, in exchange for Soviet assistance in extracting the United States from the mess in Vietnam. By the late 1960s, the Soviet Union had achieved rough strategic parity with the United States and slowing down the arms race made both economic and strategic sense to both sides. When all

estimations by both militaries recognized the ability of each country to twice destroy the other, then mutual cuts in their nuclear arsenals had become imperative.

The final arena, the competition for the Third World, was the one that had brought the superpowers closer to war against each other than any other. Korea, Cuba, Vietnam and the Arab-Israeli conflicts, to name just a few, demonstrated the risks of the unpredictability of military intervention abroad when it directly conflicted with the interests of the other superpower. Yet, this was the arena where Nixon and Brezhnev had failed to establish rules of the game. The United States and the Soviet Union had very little common ground on the subject so the two leaders glossed over their differences. To give up the contest for the hearts and minds of the Third World was to give up the Cold War. While both countries hoped to make the Cold War less dangerous, neither one wished to end it without having won. Nixon and Kissinger thought that they could use the other aspects of détente as incentives to influence Soviet manoeuvres in the Third World, but the Soviets, enjoying this long-sought recognition of superpower equality, were eager to exercise this new deference abroad. As such, failure to establish well-defined parameters for superpower behaviour in the Third World doomed détente. Despite its intent, the United States could still not bring itself to recognize the Soviet Union as an equal power in the World and the Soviet Union had failed to understand that the United States was still the dominant player and therefore could only agree to such recognition with strings attached. For Washington, those strings were meant to manipulate Moscow's interactions with the Third World. Thus, Angola, Ethiopia and Afghanistan exposed to the United States its limits as a puppeteer.

Despite the inherent flaws of détente, the superpowers were right to try. Their cooperation did avert potential catastrophe in the October 1973 Yom Kippur War in the Middle East. Also, when Gorbachev and Reagan opened new arms reduction talks in the mid-1980s, the SALT negotiations of the 1970s provided blueprints to start. Indeed, other small interactions from cultural exchanges lasted beyond the 1970s. The lesson, then, for future great power relations is that any détente must be comprehensive and deep in order to work. The difficulty is in the details, but so is any success. All areas of serious competition would require a set of rules for conduct. In addition, each party involved must hold itself to the same standards as it holds its rival. The United States had not ceased its attempts to outmanoeuvre the Soviet Union in the Third World during the 1970s as evidenced in the cases of Chile, Somalia, and most importantly Egypt and the Middle Eastern peace talks, but Washington was furious when Moscow attempted the same. All parties must also recognize the limits of their own and their rivals' powers and the effect of these on détente. While the Soviet Union had achieved strategic parity with the United States, the latter was still so much more economically powerful that it could not give the former its much desired title of equal power. Finally, any future détente would require a more concerted effort to understand the other's point of view, taking into consideration cultural differences and sincerely listening to their concerns. Jimmy Carter may not have linked human rights issues and SALT in his mind, but the Soviets did. Gromyko and Dobrynin may not have thought the Horn had anything to do with détente, but the Americans did. In both cases, dismissing the other's concerns magnified those issues. Gromyko's lie was most likely a casual one for him, but he failed to consider how seriously Carter would take it. Understanding the role of the Horn in exposing the failure

of 1970s détente should provide a step toward setting parameters that would prevent a similar conflict in the future from becoming a serious issue.

The US response to the Soviet intervention in the Horn also serves to demonstrate both the limits and possibilities of American foreign policy. The use of the term *ideology* in relation to American foreign policy tends to be an anathema to US politicians.

Ideology implies rigidity and a failure to see the real picture. In response to a question on whether there is such a beast as American ideology, Brzezinski replied, “I don’t think we have an ideology. I think we’re much more inclined to debate basic premises of what we do and sometimes we even do things on the basis of consensus reached by people with very different premises.”<sup>4</sup> This is certainly a good point especially as he contrasts the American approach to policy with the more confining Soviet approach. Yet, the United States did have a basic ideology, though perhaps not as rigid as Marxist-Leninism, and denying its existence limited the American ability to respond. American politicians across the political spectrum had a pre-conditioned mindset that the Cold War was necessary and the United States would win, meaning that combating the spread of communism was an imperative, and the United States had a moral obligation to support market economies and individual freedoms throughout the world. These goals were not always applied consistently, particularly the final point, but all American leaders agreed on their worthiness. American ideology, however, did not dictate the means to achieve these ends: therefore, the means were open for debate.

Henry Kissinger, the architect of the Nixon-Ford foreign policy, believed in *Realpolitik*, or old-fashioned power politics. He, too, ascribed to the basic tenets of American ideology, but his approach was Machiavellian. He conducted American

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<sup>4</sup> Author’s Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, 28 June 2005.

foreign policy through backchannels and personal relationships to famously mixed results. The US public, though, tired of the attitude that the ends justified the means, and Jimmy Carter understood that Americans believed that liberal democracy is the most moral form of government, and they were longing for a foreign policy that represented that. Both Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski were excited by the prospect of reinserting a moral component into American conduct abroad. However, they were unable to agree on what was moral. From the US intervention in Vietnam, Vance had learned the harsh lesson of the limits of American power. He also realized that, had the United States pursued peace from the start, the final outcome in Vietnam would have been the same, just without the terrible human toll. Brzezinski, on the other hand, felt that the United States had learned its lesson too well, and though he could see there were limits to American power, he understood that the United States was still the most powerful country in the world. Taking this into account and because of his belief in American moral superiority, he felt that Washington had both the means and an obligation to the world to stop the spread of what he saw as an immoral Soviet ideology. This seeming choice between international peace and international justice still has relevance today. Though the enemy has changed, the ideology prevails and the different points of view reflected by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War demonstrate that such debates are alive and well.

In the case of the Horn of Africa, the aspect of American Cold War ideology that dictated containment ensured that the United States had to respond to any new Soviet involvement in the Third World. Its belief in supporting market economies and

individual freedoms, however, limited its ability to do so. This was a common occurrence and often took a backseat to the first part of the ideology. Fortunately, in this case, Carter's belief in the cause of human rights and being on the right side of its history made him less willing to brush such concerns aside. Subsequent history has shown that his administration was right not to get too involved in the Horn itself. Of course, the conditions that the administration faced after the failure of Vietnam prevented Carter from taking Brzezinski's advice on intervening more forcefully in the Horn. Indeed, the current American congress would be well-advised to remember the debacles it avoided when it used its constitutional right to limit the president's ability to intervene abroad militarily.

Though the United States averted a debacle in putting an American presence on the ground in the Horn, Washington's attitude towards Ethiopia and Somalia hurt its overall Africa policy. Though many would argue that he had not gone far enough, Carter largely said and did the right things in relation to southern Africa and white racist rule. Unfortunately, however, the Cold War mindset with which he approached the Horn looked no different from the tactics of his predecessors. When the situation got tricky, Africans could see that the United States reverted to its zero-sum game with the Soviet Union.

What then does the American response to the Soviet intervention say about crisis management? First, crises must be kept in their proper perspective. The United States turned this into a much bigger deal than it was. On the other hand, the Soviet Union dismissed American concerns as groundless, when they were actually valid. Second, responding to a crisis requires a certain amount of consistency. This does not imply that

governments should stick with a course of action when it is proving to be bad policy. However, either of the philosophies promoted by Carter's two main advisors would have been better than the middle path that the administration followed. Brzezinski wanted linkage and Vance wanted to avoid it. Instead, the President linked the two while claiming not to be doing so. This example of a mixed message, one of many, became a major factor in Carter's electoral downfall. Finally, debates and disagreements are healthy and integral to democracy. As such, advisors to a leader have an obligation to convey their differences of opinion and their reasons behind them so that the leader can make a decision based on as much information as possible. In the case of Vance and Brzezinski's debate over the Horn, the two men jockeyed for influence over the President, pressuring him to make decisions on individual matters. However, it is clear that Carter did not, at least early on, understand what those small decisions meant in relation to his advisors overarching ideas. Most likely, this was not an intentional omission on their parts, but Carter may have behaved more consistently if he had better understood how they saw the larger picture of the role of the United States in the geopolitical arena.

So, who was right: Vance or Brzezinski? The first answer is that Vance was right about the American response to the Horn. It did not warrant a huge reaction, nor was it an important enough issue that it should have undermined SALT, a key component of Carter's agenda and the lynchpin of détente. The second answer is that Brzezinski was right about the Soviets, not that they had a grand design to systematically create and take over an arc of crisis, but that they would continue to intervene abroad as long as their interventions appeared to be worth it. Also, he was right that détente was not meeting

American needs. The United States was still the pre-eminent power in the world and it was not gaining what it hoped by sharing that title with the Soviet Union. Détente had not yet produced enough ties to bind Moscow into the international system to the point where it would put its standing in this system above its desires for the Third World.

Brzezinski understood that the United States needed to change or better define the rules of détente in order to make it work. Unfortunately, the Horn was a weak issue on which to hinge this attempt at conversion. Washington had no leverage there.

What if the Soviet intervention in the Horn had not proved to the United States that détente had failed? Could it have been prolonged and in view of the end of the Cold War, would that have been desirable? The prevailing view among many scholars and politicians in the United States is that the tough policies and renewed arms race during the Reagan era put so much pressure on Moscow that it imploded.<sup>5</sup> Those subscribing to such a view see the end of détente as a good and necessary step in that process. Other scholars note that the end of the Cold War was actually a result of the institutional weaknesses of the Soviet system, regardless of its competition with the United States.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, they argue that Gorbachev only instituted glasnost and perestroika once he felt that Soviet-American relations had stabilised to the point that he could concentrate on domestic issues. In this case, the extension of détente perhaps could have brought about that process earlier. We will never know. The world is lucky the Cold War ended relatively peacefully, but had Gorbachev been another man, this may not have been the

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<sup>5</sup> One of the foremost US historians on the Cold War subscribes to this view. See John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*. (The Penguin Press, New York: 2005), pp. 217, 222, 226.

<sup>6</sup> For example see Archie Brown, "Perestroika and the End of the Cold War" *Cold War History*. Vol. 7, Issue 1, pp. 1-17. For more on the historiography of the end of the Cold War, see Michael Cox, "Another Transatlantic Split? American and European Narratives and the End of the Cold War" *Cold War History*. Vol 7, Issue 1, pp.121-138.

case. It was certainly not a controlled process, whereas a successful détente could perhaps manage a transition from Cold War to peace. Regardless, had détente lasted, a few of the post-Cold War pitfalls may have been avoided. What is unfortunate is that arms control had enough merit on its own to remain outside of the other aspects of détente, so the concept of linkage was ultimately damaging to the international community. Where are all of those weapons now that the Soviets produced in the resurgent arms race of the 1980's?

As is still the case, the world's poorer nations suffer the most for great power mistakes. The Third World ultimately bore the brunt of the breakdown of the détente. After its failure, there were still no rules to guide superpower behaviour. As the Soviet Union was mired down in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the United States intervened overtly or covertly in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama and Geneva. All had their own national nightmares, but suffered all the more for superpower involvement. In addition, these interventions backfired politically on the superpowers. The CIA backed the anti-Soviet mujahideen in Afghanistan, who after taking over the country, harboured Osama Bin Laden in their midst. The American military, along with coalition forces, are currently in South Asia trying to rectify the earlier mistake. As for Latin America, Carter's initiatives to improve the US image did not get very far and Presidents' Reagan and George H.W. Bush caused relations to backtrack by invoking the despised Monroe doctrine to promote US interests in Central America and the Caribbean.

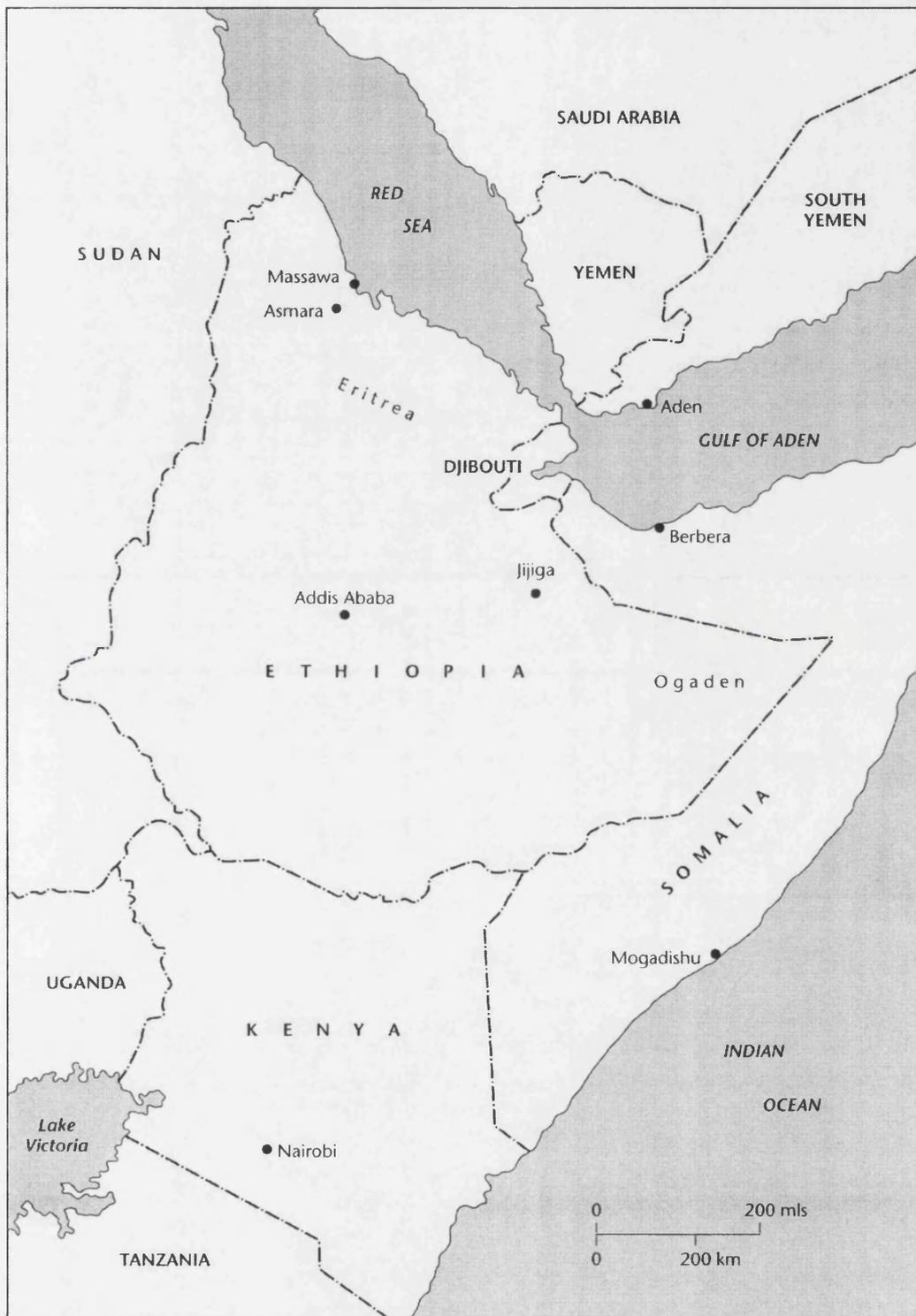
Then, what does the crisis in the Horn add to the understanding of superpowers and local events? First of all, there are always limits to power and Cold War competition had the effect to create even more limits. As was true throughout the Cold War, small

countries were easily able to manipulate the superpowers by playing them against each other. Mengistu and Siad Barre wanted arms and threatened their patrons with seeking them from the other superpower in order to keep the pipeline flowing. Each had a preferred patron, but the military equipment was more important than ideological affinity, contributing to the rather cynical switching of allies in the region. Thus, though a superpower might have beaten out the other for influence in a given country, the local player held far more relative power than its actual power in relation to its patron. Despite all the Soviet Union's military might and economic power compared to Ethiopia, Mengistu managed to get his way in most disputes. This leads to the second point which is simply that massive intervention into a chaotic situation tends to just exacerbate the problem. The United States was incredibly frustrated by its ineffectiveness to influence events on the Horn, but the Soviets, despite a successful military outcome, ended up in a far worse predicament. Once again, a lack of understanding of local conditions undermined a superpower's attempts to impose its values on an underdeveloped country. Moscow was stuck with an undesirable client, lost SALT II, and ultimately looked ineffective and embarrassed when its client's Soviet-supported policies resulted in the most famous famine of the twentieth century. Of course, this is the tragic paradox of the conflict in the Horn. It had no strategic value, nor did superpower intervention benefit Ethiopia, Somalia or Eritrea. It infected Soviet-American bilateral relations, exposed the inadequacy of détente and helped set back the cause of reducing the world's nuclear arsenals. As was so often the case in the Cold War, there were no winners, just more victims.

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# THE COLD WAR IN AFRICA

(b) The Ogaden War. 1977-78



From Young, J. *Longman Companion to America, Russia and the Cold War*. © Addison Wesley Longman Limited 1993, 1999.

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