

Soviet Union Opens Peace Initiative On African Horn

The Soviet Union has launched a diplomatic counter-offensive to the Carter Administration's efforts to destabilize the tension-filled Horn of northeast Africa.

The USSR is attempting to settle the upsetting territorial disputes between Ethiopia and Somalia — both countries have good relations with the Soviets — and to negotiate an end to the bloody secessionist struggle in Ethiopia's coastal province of Eritrea, a struggle which provides another avenue for destabilizing Ethiopia's socialist leadership and could cut the country off from the sea.

Last week, a Soviet delegation held talks with leaders of circles in the Eritrean secessionist movement, who are open to negotiations; another Eritrean leader met with Libyan officials in Tripoli. These circles have, in the past, indicated their willingness to negotiate an end to the war in Eritrea, and are responding to an offer made in Moscow by Ethiopian head of state Mengistu Haile Mariam to grant regional autonomy to Eritrea within a federal Ethiopia — provided there are guarantees of Ethiopian access to the Sea. Mengistu made the offer during a visit to Moscow earlier this month, and reportedly asked the Soviets to make the preliminary advances.

Soviet and other socialist country representatives have also made an increasing number of visits to the pro-socialist governments of Somalia and Democratic (South) Yemen, across the Gulf of Aden from Somalia at the mouth of the Red Sea. These visits follow attempts by the pro-U.S. governments of Sudan and Saudi Arabia to "buy" Somalia away from their Soviet ties, an effort reportedly aided by a visit to Somalia this week by the

British Foreign Office's Africa specialist Edward Rowlands and an offer to discuss supplying Somalia with U.S. weapons by the American Ambassador in Somalia John Loughran.

Cuban President Fidel Castro yesterday denied reports that he has sent military advisors to Ethiopia for an oft-reported but never materialized onslaught against Eritrea by an Ethiopian peasant army. Castro told ABC reporter Barbara Walters that he had sent medical and diplomatic personnel to the country, but emphasized that he would send military personnel if the Ethiopians requested them.

Castro's message to Carter is that the Cuban government is committed to peace on the Horn and, as in Angola, will defend their allies against the Trilateral Commission's subversion. In addition, Castro is still organizing to bring about a confederation of the three socialist countries bordering the Red Sea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Democratic Yemen.

The Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference, held in Tripoli, Libya this week, also supported a peace program for the Horn, issuing a statement on the Eritrean question in their final communique: "The Conference studies the question of Eritrea and decided to coordinate its efforts with those of the Organization of African Unity in view of a just and equitable settlement in the framework of Afro-Asian brotherhood." Such a statement is a slap in the face to the Saudi and Sudanese efforts — on behalf of the Trilateral Administration in Washington — to use the Eritrea struggle to try to bring down the Ethiopian regime.