

# U.S., Soviets Face Test Of Detente Over Horn Of Africa

The Soviet Union and the United States are locked in a confrontation, set up and managed on both sides by British intelligence, over the Horn of Africa. But, despite the tough talk, there are signs that both Washington and Moscow are taking steps to prevent the crisis from escalating wildly out of control.

The Horn of Africa confrontation, however, is only part of a general campaign by the City of London and its American allies like Henry Kissinger to poison U.S.-Soviet relations. The sudden Canadian expulsion of the Soviet Ambassador and several aides, itself a throwback to the days of the Cold War, and related British intelligence provocations in Europe and the Middle East have created a climate in which the intensifying Horn of Africa fighting might send U.S.-Soviet relations into a dangerous tailspin.

The immediate onset of the crisis emerged last week with the reports of an offensive by Ethiopian troops against Somali positions in the Ogaden desert region of Ethiopia. That area, which is claimed as part of "Greater Somalia" by the Somali government, has been occupied by a synthetic army of "ethnic" Somali troops. According to highly informed sources, however, the level of actual armed conflict in the backward region is miniscule, and hardly merits the headlines it receives in the world's press. But key conduits for the City of London, including the Reuters news agency, have blown the war in Ogaden way out of proportion. Further, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the British press have wildly exaggerated the extent of Soviet and Cuban presence in Ethiopia.

On Feb. 10, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance delivered a low-key policy statement that reflected the efforts of the State Department to avoid manufacturing a major crisis over the strategically barren Horn of Africa. Vance implied that Washington had received assurances from the Soviet Union, which has given military support to Ethiopia, that Ethiopian troops would not carry their offensive beyond the Ethiopian-Somali border. "We don't see it going that far," said Vance. The day before, State Department spokesman Hodding Carter III said that the U.S. supported the Organization of African Unity moves to settle the crisis.

But grave danger still exists. With the approaching defeat of Somali forces in Ethiopia, the government of

Somali President Siad Barre is in severe jeopardy. Barre's position in Somalia, now linked inextricably to the mad "Greater Somalia faction," is undermined by the defeat his forces are suffering, and his country is faced with an unconditional surrender. The blatant illegality of the Somali claim to Ogaden, which has lost Somalia backing from virtually every country in the world, has so far prevented the West, the Arabs, and the Africans from aiding Barre.

## *Worrying Signs*

The crisis facing the Somalian regime is being used to demand an urgent NATO intervention to provide arms and military supplies to Somalia. Particular efforts are being made to draw the Arab states, led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, into support for Somalia's lost cause, in order to wreck Arab-Soviet ties and create a general framework for a NATO-Arab Cold War bloc.

Certain worrying signs have come from Washington about the regional flare-up. Vance himself warned that the U.S. is concerned about the presence of "2,000 Cubans" in Ethiopia, and the *New York Times* reported that the U.S. has called a halt to the talks on demilitarization of the Indian Ocean as part of a warning to the USSR. In addition, there are reports that U.S. naval vessels are patrolling the waters off Ethiopia. High-level U.S. intelligence officials report that, if the Soviets are foolishly drawn into a show of force in the area, then the U.S. might consider raising the ante again.

As of late last week, both the Europeans and the Organization of African Unity had begun limited diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict. At a meeting in Paris between French President Giscard d'Estaing and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the two European leaders pledged to support efforts to restore peace in the Horn, and as a signal the French sent an aircraft carrier to their base in Djibouti, between Somalia and Ethiopia. The Nigerian government also sent a mission to both countries to seek a middle ground. The French daily *Le Figaro* reported that a four-part plan is under discussion: (1) a general ceasefire, (2) a Somali withdrawal from Ogaden, (3) the arrival of an international peace-keeping force, and (4) peace negotiations.

— Bob Dreyfus