

Ogaden War as the Cornerstone of Cold War Détente Politics¹

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Abstract:

Horn of Africa still faces serious regional conflicts and needs a detailed historical analysis regarding the Cold War era. Historical research shows that despite the era of détente; new Soviet geopolitical successes were demonstrated. This study examines reasons for Siad Barre's destabilizing efforts to liberate all Somalis and establish "Greater Somalia". It also tries to find answer how the Soviet Union, which had favoured Somalia previously, switched to the new socialist government in Ethiopia, and why Washington became an ally of Somalia. Due to the massive large-scale military operation aided by the Soviet Union and Cuba, the Somali army was totally defeated. Subsequently, the attack has worsened the country's foreign relations with other states, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has remained divided in the case. In the present study the author attempts to capture the main points of Ogaden conflict by exploring different aspects of foreign interventions in Cold War geopolitical playground, how these factors have led to the fall of détente politics.

Keywords:

Horn of Africa;
Ethiopia; Greater
Somalia; détente; Cold
War history.

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12700/jceas.2025.5.3.355>

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Introduction

The issue of Ogaden war has not received enough attention to investigate the geopolitical and regional security risk issues. This was a brief but costly Cold War conflict in 1977-78 fought by Ethiopia and Somalia. At the heart of it, three important past legacies can be found: 1. European colonial rule, 2. Somali irredentism 3. Superpowers' intervention. This research aims to make a modest contribution to the discourse on the realignment of Cold War superpowers during the 1977 Ogaden War through selected academic articles, theses, chapters in volumes, dissertations and online media reports. A lot of political scientists have theorized the possible factors that led to the fall of détente. The conflict is well documented in the work of Fred Halliday (1977), who discusses U.S. policy changes, while David D. Laitin (1976, 1977) deals with the Somalian revolutionary and military rule. In his dissertation Samuel Makinda (1985) narrates how superpowers' intervention has decided the outcomes of war. The extant literature that dwells on violent conflicts of Ogaden include the publications of Joseph K. Nkassery (1997) and Donna R. Jackson (2010), showing the connection between this regional war and the fall of superpowers' diplomatic efforts. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Cold War was characterised by a period known as 'détente' to reduce tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The question of détente was viewed as an important factor as a result of change in U.S.-Soviet relations to avoid a Cold War military confrontation. Has the Vietnam War made Washington to improve inter-state relations? Why has been the Ogaden war a focus point in Cold War politics? What could have been the reaction of the regional powers, and what more challenges have remained to solve in the present?

By the end of the 1970s, the developing spirit of détente began to fade away. Given the fact, that the Ogaden War was just the beginning of a series of bloody conflicts, I cannot undertake in-depth research, only the period between the Somali invasion and the withdrawal on 8 March 1978 will be the scope, in order to contribute to a better understanding of social and political problems. The first part starts with a geopolitical overview; the second chapter provides a historical summary to comprehensively explore the causes of turbulent relations. It is followed by a review of American and Soviet foreign policy strategies that focuses on the intensification of Cold War dynamics. The fifth part goes through the military events, while the last one presents the superpowers' intervention.

Geopolitical Context of the Horn of Africa

The East-African region commonly mentioned as Horn of Africa. It covers an area of 2,033,283 km² east of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. At the time of Ogaden War the Horn consisted of five independent countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan

and Uganda.³ The picture is further complicated, as relations between local tribes here have been conflictual and turbulent. Another important aspect is that the region remains one of the poorest and most conflict-ridden corners of the continent with droughts, floods, tribal wars and famines (Nkaissery, 1997, p. 5; Mariam 1964, pp. 189-190).

Ethiopia has an area of approximately 1,251,282 km², it is stretched to the Red Sea in the north and to Sudan in the west, southwards to Kenya, south-east to Somalia and north to Djibouti. The environment varies from desert and savannah in the lowlands to rain forest and grasslands in the highlands. The population could be divided into four larger ethnic groups: Amhara-Tigre, Oromo, Sidamo and Somali people. Christianity, Islam and numerous animist religions are also practised (Wood 1983, p. 510). The territory of Ogaden can be estimated around 200,000 km² in size, it consists mostly of barren plain to the Somali border. Mostly Somalis build up its population, with many clans and sub-clans, who deal with manual labour and agriculture. Moreover, the road network in some areas does not exist, thus movement by motorized vehicles is significantly hindered during the rainy season (Nkaissery 1997, p. 6). Much of the population belongs to the Cushitic, Semitic or Oromo tribes, with more than 50 different languages. The remainder speak Nilo-Saharan languages, they make up roughly 2% of the population (Marsai, 2020, pp. 881-882). Ethiopia's only significant railway line crosses the region, it connects Addis Abeba with the port of Djibouti, which was both used for personal and cargo transportation as the main gateway to the global trade networks (Hughes, 2019). Ethiopia's modern history dates from the emergence of Emperor Theodore in 1855, whose successor, Menelik II had several merits, as he consolidated the centralised state, built the new capital Addis Ababa ("New Flower") and began creating a modern government apparatus. In 1896 the invading Italian army was defeated at Adowa, that ended the on-going colonial attempts (Robinson - Yamazaki, 1986, p. 328). Even though the Ethiopian Highlands basically avoided permanent occupation, tensions can be traced back to the period of colonization, and by conquering the lower areas, the country has participated in colonization by subjugating the Oromos and the Somalis (Marsai, 2020, p. 13.)

Emperor Haile Selassie (ruled 1930-1974) remained an old-fashioned autocrat, but he has made great efforts to modernize his country, by launching modern education and established university in Addis Abeba. A long-term drought continued and by 1973 famine had threatened the lives of nomads, who had to relocate their cattle into Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan, seeking shelter from starvation. By the end of 1973 about 300,000 peasants of Tigray and Welo regions have died. In 1974 Haile Selassie's imperial regime collapsed,⁴ and a military junta (Derg) took power (Robinson - Yamazaki, 1986, p.328; Abate 1993, pp. 79, 87; Keller 1993, p.76).

³ The Horn of Africa region overlaps the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, controls the Bab el Mandeb Straits and dominates a part of the Gulf of Aden (Schwab, 1978, p. 6).

⁴ The Ethiopian revolution, born from the mutiny of the military personnel stationed in Neghele and Asmara to denounce the poor living conditions and the low pay, turned into a coup d'état (Mosca, 2015, p. 52).

Africa's easternmost country, Somalia has a land area of 637,540 km², and consists mainly of plains and high lands, faces the Arabian Peninsula to the north, bounded by Djibouti to the northeast, while to the western and southern by Ethiopia and Kenya (Samatar, 1992b, p. 59). The territory is largely desert or semi-desert, and drought threatens 12 months of the year. 60 percent of Somalia is savannah, which is partly used for grazing. Less than two percent of the country's territory can be cultivated (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 10). Somalia's demographic data can only be estimated. According to the census held in 1975 the population was 3.2 million. From an ethnic, linguistic, and religious point of view, Somalia is the most homogeneous country in Africa: 85 percent Somali, 15 percent Bantu, Arab, Persian and Pakistani (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 26). The territory could not satisfy the high food demands of the locals, many Somali nomads crossed into the Ogaden with their herds of cattle, sheep, goats and camels in intensive search of water or grazing ground. The population is centred around Harghessa and Mogadishu, this dualism can be traced back to separate colonial administration by Britain and Italy. Somalia has two permanent rivers, the Webi Shabelle and the Webi Jubba (Mariam 1964, pp. 189-193; Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 13).

Brief History of Somali Nationalism

A historical overview of Somali nationalism will be presented, with its ups and downs, to analyse the core reasons how this people has been living here since centuries. In African context Somali people are unique, as they form a homogenous population, speak one language, have single faith. Their grazing grounds were colonised in the 19th century by the European powers (Britain and Italy) and the Ethiopian Empire. Consequently, they are inevitably affected by the problems arising in the region, thus these tribes have always shown an unwillingness to serve any foreign power (Samatar 1992b, pp. 5-8).

First stage of organised Somali Arab political activity appeared in the 16th century, as the medieval state of Zeila emerged, that was characterized by a trade outlet of important materials, including coffee, gold and myrrh exporting to the Middle East, China, and India. Ahmad Guray's attempt to gain control over Ethiopia has failed through a Portuguese expedition led by Pedro da Gama, - the son of Vasco da Gama, who was looking for the land of Prester John a Christian monarch in European legends -, arrived from the sea and the joint Ethiopian-Portuguese army has defeated the Muslim invaders (Samatar 1992b, pp. 5-8). In 1885 the British Protectorate was established, later French Somaliland was also created, and Italians grabbed Eritrea and the southern Somali coast. In the mountainous interior region Ethiopia remained independent. In 1897 agreement was signed with France and Britain regarding the exact boundaries. With Italy the so-called „cartographic agreement” ensured the border between Ethiopia and Italian Somalia, which was drawn by the Ethiopian Emperor himself (Sheik-Abdi 1977, p. 658; Paul 1977, p. 3).

Second stage of Somali self-awareness became visible as Sayyid Mohammed Hassan variously engaged the Brits, Ethiopians and Italians. From 1920 Haji Farah Omar carried out further political activities, which can be easily explained as „Somali proto-nationalism.” To explain the dynamics of Somali nationalism, it is necessary to consider both external and internal factors. In 1935 Mussolini launched his attack, thus Ogaden fell under the Somalian province of the newly formed Italian East Africa, where a further increase in nationalist claims have developed. However, in 1941 the whole region came under British military administration, conversely it has contributed to the irredentist claim of Greater Somalia. In 1943 the Somali Youth Club was created, which changed its name to Somali Youth League (SYL) and adopted the goals of unifying all Somali-speaking territories and opposing clannishness (Sheik-Abdi 1977, p. 660; Mariam 1964, p. 207).

Independence was achieved in two steps. In 1960 British Somaliland became independent on 26 June 1960, then five days later the former Italian-Somalia. The two areas were united under the name of the Republic of Somalia (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 39). The Somalis have long pursued an irredentist policy towards the Ogaden province of Ethiopia by claiming that the area is populated by nomadic Somalis, since Somalia stressed the unity of its people in terms of religion, language and ethnicity (Schwab, 1978, p. 10). Obviously, as the „Pan-Somali attitude” was declared, the neighbouring countries had big fear, with only limited external support to counterbalance it. On Somalia’s national flag - a five-pointed white star on a sea of light blue - each one represents a different Somali territory, being the Ogaden one of them (Laitin 1977a, p. 450). Mogadishu dictated its territorial claim to every African and Non-Aligned countries, but OAU and UN were both strongly committed to preserve the borders of newly independent states. By late 1964 Jomo Kenyatta and Haile Selassie signed a mutual defence agreement against the possible Somali destabilization, which was renewed in 1979 and in 1989 (Sheik-Abdi 1977, p. 661).

Fourth stage began on October 21, 1969, when General Muhammad Siad Barre seized power in a coup.⁵ Initially, a comprehensive nation-wide education campaign started, eliminating 'tribalism', introducing a new script. Somali has become the only official language, as a real political symbol of a nation-state (Laitin 1977b, p. 11). It is important to emphasize, that until the mid-1970s the regime enjoyed popular support. Not only the national economy has experienced intense revitalisation, but military assistance has been also provided under the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow. The Somali army has become the best-equipped in Africa: 23,000-man, about 250 T-34, T-54 and T-55 tanks completed with more than 300 armoured personnel carriers ready to fight for Siad Barre’s irredentist goals (Ofcansky 1992, pp. 183-184).



American Foreign Policy

Military instalments have always been one of the most direct indicators of strategic influence improving military capacity in Cold War competition. The situation has become even more complex between 1974 to 1976, when the resulting security vacuum has led to emerging superpower involvement. According to Brezhnev's views the conflicts of the Third World were not part of détente policy (Makinda 1985, p. 127). Considering the geopolitical and environmental factors, Ethiopia has had scheduled as an important strategic hub, where the crossroads of Africa, Europe and Asia join. Developments were already underway: mass independence of African nations in 1960 and the establishment of the Organization of African Union (OAU), further justified Washington's economic and military role (Yordanov 2012, p. 98). The British military mission was withdrawn in 1952; thus the US took it over as the new patron.

On 23 May 1953 two agreements were signed: *Defence Installations* as a 25-year lease on the Kagnaw radio station to monitor Soviet signals linking the region with Australia, thousands of kilometres separated, besides that providing a high frequency transmitter for diplomatic communication system (Halliday, 1977, pp. 10-11). Asmara was selected because of its position near to the Equator, which means low radio interference. The base's main function was to transmit, relay and receive every communication from US diplomatic missions and military units around Africa as well as to relay messages to the Indian Ocean and even the Far East. The personnel tried to achieve friendly relations with the locals; 30 volunteers gave lectures at Asmara University and other schools or worked with the villagers on agricultural development projects. This was how the United States was able to build an increasingly positive image of itself in Ethiopia (Howe, 1970).

According to the *Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement*, the US provided 5 million dollars to equip and train three 6,000-member military divisions under the supervision of a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) which arrived in 1953. In 1960 a fourth division was also trained, thus the number of soldiers was around 40.000. The circumstances were greatly facilitated by the fact that the resulting political instability further increased the susceptibility of locals. In response to the 1960 coup against Haile Selassie and the fears from the newly independent Somalia, Ethiopia has also contributed to the security and sent 3000 soldiers to the UN mission to Belgian Congo (Halliday, 1977, p. 11). As a determined American ally, Haile Selassie tried to use diplomacy, as he mediated between Morocco and Algeria in 1963, and he sent aid to Mobutu against Communist threat.⁶

His greatest diplomatic achievement happened in 1963, as the headquarters of OAU was placed to Addis Abeba. The emperor also maintained a close relationship with the US ally Israel, which provided counter-insurgency training against the Eritreans. (Makinda 1985, p. 73). As an important impetus, the US Embassy suggested land reform,

⁶ A longstanding ally of the United States, Ethiopia relied heavily on American arms, equipment, and funding (Fiorelli, 2024, p. 32).

legal modernisation, decentralisation. In the early 1970s the Kagnew Base began to be of less importance, due to the developments of satellite communication, thus an uninhabited Indian Ocean Island of Diego Garcia was intended to replace it. The number of personnel working on Kagnew reached its peak in 1971 with 3000, were less and less, only 35 in 1976 (Halliday, 1977, p. 13).

The first sign of cooling in diplomatic relations happened in May 1973 when Haile Selassie visited Nixon, and his request for new jets and M-60 tanks were refused. To make matters worse, the famine of 1972-1973, led to the overthrow of the emperor in 1974. The US tried to reduce its visibility, working only with local allies, Iran and Saudi Arabia.⁷ By 1976, Sudan started getting American military assistance, and expelled all Soviet advisers. Kenya's relations with Washington had been promising, since its independence. Surprisingly, in 1975 the United States received a request for cooperation from Somalia, that it was ready to expel the Soviets (Makinda 1985, pp. 14-17, 108, 121-122).

In November 1977 the Somalis expelled all Soviet advisers⁸. However, it should be emphasized that meanwhile in Ethiopia the controlling of the Derg fell into the hands of Mengistu Haile Mariam, his policy opened the way for closer ties with Moscow. This was compounded by a further deterioration in public security in the Horn. In February 1977 the new Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance told the Senate committee that as a result of human rights violation, American military aid to Ethiopia, Argentina and Uruguay would be reduced from October 1977. On 23 April the Derg ordered all US installations in the country to leave, except the Embassy and the Aid Office. Radio Addis Abeba has criticised Carter's decision about the withdrawal of aid (Halliday, 1977, pp. 18-20).

Soviet Foreign Policy

Soviet presence in the Red Sea dates back to the 1950s, when Khrushchev established relations with Egypt. Nasser allowed the use of military facilities, but with his death in 1970, Moscow lost one of its greatest friends. Moreover, Somalia approached a number of Western countries for military assistance, but nobody wanted to be identified with its multi-irredentist goal (Makinda 1985, pp. 14-17, 81-86). On 11 September 1960 the diplomatic relations started with Moscow. Ali Shermarke Somali Prime Minister claimed that his country was taking the socialist path and signed agreements on the establishment of two hospitals and a secondary school, construction of a printing plant in Mogadishu, and installation of a radio station and the deep-sea port at Berbera.

Moreover, left-wing military juntas led by Siad Barre in Somalia and in Sudan by Ga'afar Nimeiry emerged and adopted a much more aggressive strategy than before,

⁷ As ideological differences between the United States and Ethiopia grew, both sides became increasingly hostile toward one another and believed that their interests were bound to conflict (Fiorelli, 2024, p. 32).

⁸ Somalia's fighting force relied on Soviet weapons, funding, and training. At the start of the war, more than 4,000 Soviet military and technical advisors were stationed in Somalia (Fiorelli, 2024, p. 32).

parallel with Muammar Gaddafi's rise to power in 1969 (Yordanov 2012, pp. 67-69, 118). Next to these, Anwar Sadat, signed a Treaty of Friendship with the USSR in March 1971, but he expelled all Soviet personnel in July 1972. This step has also determined Egypt's policy to the United States for aid (Makinda 1985, pp. 81-85). Following the 1973 Arab Israeli war, Moscow was gradually excluded from the Middle Eastern peace process. In 1974 Soviet President Podgorny visited Somalia for signing a Friendship Treaty, thus Mogadishu believed the future Soviet support would be done for her territorial claims, but it was misunderstood. Somalia under Saudi and Iranian influence joined the Arab League in 1974 as the first non-Arabic state (David 1979, pp. 72-76). All these factors showed that the Soviets moved with caution in reacting to the Ethiopian revolution. The hesitation of the USSR stemmed from its ties to Somalia and doubts about Provisional Military Administrative Council's announcement that Ethiopia was now Socialist, thus wasn't Moscow quick to respond to Ethiopian request for military aid (Katz, 1990, p. 85). In April 1976, the Council adopted a program for national democratic revolution, thus the relation with the Soviets improved. It should be stressed, that the new government's delegation visited Moscow in July, where the Soviets praised the Ethiopian revolution, and promised help in various fields (Katz, 1990, p. 86). The Derg emphasised to establish Socialism on 12 September 1976, thus Ethiopia signed a military contract with the USSR. As Moscow moved closer to the Derg, it simultaneously distanced itself from the Eritrean liberation struggle (Makinda 1985, p. 111). On May 6, 1977, Mengistu reached a series of agreements with Moscow which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in November 1978.⁹ The Ethiopian revolution had more Marxist character than the "classless nomads" of Somalia. Moreover, Ethiopia's central location and position as host the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), made it more valuable for Moscow (Oberndorfer, 1978). From the end of November 1977 through February 1978, Moscow airlifted 12-15.000 Cuban troops to Ethiopia, including three combat brigades and delivered up to one billion USD in weapons and equipment. The Carter Administration, especially Zbigniew Brzezinski saw a crisis of Soviet influence expanding from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian peninsula (Rodman, 1994, p. 158).

From Fall of 1977 the number of Soviet advisors in Ethiopia increased dramatically, the combined number of experts from the Socialist countries had reached more than 7000.¹⁰ In some parts of the government bureaucracy, such as water supplies, energy and transport, Soviets, East Germans, Bulgarians and Cubans were carrying out most of the work. Meanwhile suitable Ethiopian personnel were being trained in the Soviet Union or Eastern European countries. The priority of the advisers in Addis Abeba was

⁹ On May 6, 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam publicly signed two friendship pacts with the Soviet Union and privately signed a military aid pact estimated at \$400 million, which was more than the total amount of aid that the United States had provided to Ethiopia in the last three decades (Fiorelli, 2024, p. 34).

¹⁰ The Soviet Union also initiated a massive airlift to Ethiopia, transferring dozens of fighter jets and helicopters, 500 tanks, more than a thousand surface-to-air missiles, as well as small arms, mortars, rockets, and artillery guns (Fiorelli, 2024, p. 35).

the construction of a Marxist-Leninist party that could lead the revolution in the future (Westad, 2005, pp. 279-280).

In this context, Somalis feared that a Soviet-backed Ethiopia would pose a greater threat. In contrary, Soviets hoped that both countries would subordinate themselves under a "progressive" socialist federation including Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and South Yemen. The idea was proposed by Fidel Castro in March 1977, as he brought together these countries' leaders in an all-night summit session in Aden, but the plan became a failure. Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny tried the same at the next month, but also unsuccessfully (Oberndorfer, 1978). When the Ogaden War started, Soviet reaction labelled the Somalis as aggressors in August 1977, thus they cut off all supplies, which led to the expelling over 1500 Soviet military advisers from the country (David 1979, pp. 74-79).

Somali Destabilization Efforts

At the heart of turbulent geopolitical relations, Somalia took advantage of foreign policy opportunity provided by the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie, that resulted uncertain and chaotic conditions. Mogadishu started supporting local guerrilla movements operating in Ogaden. (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 43). The process that led to the uprising started in early 1975, when the Somali state reorganized the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF).¹¹ In 1976 the extension of insurgents' attacks happened throughout Haraghe, Bale and Sidamo, left over both Christian Amhara settlers and Oromo peasants dead and properties destroyed. (Tareke 2000, pp. 639-647).

For the end 1976 the rebels dominated Ethiopia's eastern territory (Ogaden) and the Bale-Sidamo lowlands. By targeting communication lines, bridges, sabotaging the economy, the Somalis managed to destabilize the whole region and turning it into a chaotic battlefield. The best example of this, is the guerilla warfare with „hit-and-run" tactics, that also highlighted the inability of the local Ethiopian military leadership to completely break away from traditional warfare. The intensity of terrorist attacks has been demonstrated by the fact that on June 1977 the guerillas blew up the rail link between Addis Abeba and Djibouti, which normally carried over 40 percent of Ethiopia's exports. On July 13, 1977, the regular Somali forces (about 5000 soldiers) crossed the border and launched attacks on different targets. The undoubted manifestation of territorial ambitions was a reflection of the tactics used by armoured infantry, intensive artillery and the surprise factor (Tareke 2000, pp. 639-647).

By autumn, 35,000 regular and 15,000 irregular soldiers were fighting in the area. The Somali armoured troops were much stronger than the Ethiopian army with 250 T-34 and T-55 tanks (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 43). They penetrated 700 km into Ogaden, seizing around 350.000 km². The situation was too serious for the local military units, as they could only hold their ground at Dire Dawa, and the Ethiopian

¹¹ The Ogaden region had already been at the centre of a clash between the two states in 1964 over the regulation of the border. The Organisation for African Unity (OAU) was called to express its opinion on the dispute, which warned the two nations to respect the territorial integrity (Mosca, 2015, p. 58).

government was helpless. The instability in the Ogaden Region has had negative social and economic consequences at national level (Tareke 2000, pp. 639-647).

For these reasons between 13th and 16th July 1977 motorized battalion had slipped through the front by night, and appeared to have taken the region under Somali control, with the exception of Dire Dawa, Harar and Jijiga. In mid-August 1977 they tried to capture Dire Dawa, a tank unit was able to press through, while the air traffic control was destroyed. In retaliation, the Ethiopian air-force could annihilate tanks, flying from the Debre Zeit air base. The Somalis were defeated at Dire Dawa, because of weak coordination of infantry, tanks and aviation (Tareke 2000, pp. 639-647). The Somali soldiers looted shops and bars, but the local residents received them with great elation. As they moved deeper, their overstretched lines became more vulnerable. It was easier to defend the mountainous terrain against a mechanized army, and coordination of war plans were never adequate. Mogadishu was primarily focused on getting foreign military aid, burning the bridge with the Eastern Bloc without getting aid from the West (Tareke 2000, pp. 647-662).

Ultimately, the outcome of the conflict was decided by the Soviet Union by leaving Somalia alone and starting to support Ethiopia, as its government was communist-minded. The reorganized Ethiopian army had 50,000 troops in the Ogaden region, reinforced by Soviet-supplied artillery, tanks, 11,000 Cuban troops, and 1,500 Soviet advisers. Its ability to remain effective was demonstrated (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, pp. 43-44). Moscow continued to provide political guidance and massive military aid (aircraft, tanks, artillery guns, air defence weapons) to Ethiopia, and the arrival of two South Yemeni armoured battalions considerably boosted the firepower. As the situation became increasingly unfavourable, getting arms have become of primary importance for Siad Barre. Conservative Muslim regimes, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan could have been possible partners. All these factors were even more pronounced with the aid to Ethiopia was consisted of 1000 military advisers and Cuban troops around 18.000. In January the Supreme Military Strategic Comitee (SMSC) composed of Ethiopian, Soviet and Cuban officers was set up led by General Vasilii Petrov (Tareke 2000, pp. 654-662).

Following this, in the highly coordinated two-stage comprehensive campaign, the Ethiopian and Cuban military alliance has beaten the enemy at Jijiga, pushed towards to the northeast, bypassed the Marda Pass area and has attacked the Somali forces in the rear. The scale of the counterattack was further illustrated by the fact that 3,000 Somali soldiers died in the battle. Within a week, Ethiopia managed to regain its major cities (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, pp. 44-45). By 8, March Somalis could not hold for long, and Siad Barre announced the withdrawal. On 16-17, March most of Ogaden was liberated. Signalling it, six days later Addis Abeba declared the official end of the war (Tareke 2000, pp. 654-662). The adventure was disastrous for Somalia: the army lost 8,000 men, one third of its personnel, two thirds of the armoured forces and half of its air force (Kiss, Besenyő and Resperger 2014, p. 45).



Figure 1: Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Source:

<https://defenceindepth.co/2019/02/19/the-battle-for-the-horn-of-africa-a-retrospective/>

Superpowers' Intervention

African policy remained a backwater for Nixon and Kissinger, who have never conceptualized how the continent fits into the concept of détente. While popular narratives hold that the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ended this era, many historians claim that the intervention in Ogaden buried the spirit of détente (Wilkins, 2020). President Carter took office in 1977. After Vietnam and Watergate, he emphasized disarmament and human rights. His plan was to conclude a new SALT agreement and wanted to view all Third World issues through the prism of Cold War. Ogaden can rightfully be called his first foreign policy crisis (Jackson, 2010, p. 28). His administration inherited it as one of many postponed decisions, thus there was growing disenchantment with Ethiopia and a growing temptation to place a U.S. bet on Somalia (Obernhöfer, 1978).

To fully comprehend the inner workings, one must look on Cyrus Vance's and Zbigniew Brzezinski's main ideological differences, that would have influenced the US foreign policy. According to Brzezinski's rather pessimistic outlook, the Soviets were pursuing a strategy of indirect expansionism, but Vance dealt with the problems in local regional context. Brzezinski had 3 major policy objectives: a.) An emphasis on human rights with the promotion of American democracy b.) Improvement of the US' strategic position by using the Sino-American relations c.) Regain the friendship of the Third World (Yordanov 2012, p. 262). For all these reasons, there was no specific definition or clear vision for the meaning of détente, Brezhnev never had the idea that Soviet military activism in Africa would undermine SALT II. That should also be stressed, that Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance told on a Senate hearing three weeks after Mengistu had taken power, that he had removed Ethiopia, Argentina and Uruguay from the list of aid recipients in case of human rights violations, indicating that Carter was not

satisfied. This aid cut has been seized upon by some conservatives as evidence that Carter's human rights policy drove Ethiopia into Moscow's arms (Wilkins, 2020).

Despite the ongoing political tensions, Carter was unable reconciling his rhetoric on human rights with the emphasis on Cold War imperatives, which led to confusion. The US informed Ethiopia in April 1977 about the reduce of MAAG personnel and the closure of Kagnaw Base. The Derg responded on 23 April 1977 by asking Washington to close it down within 4 days and gave marching order to its personnel. On 27 April, all arms supplies were suspended, forcing Addis Abeba to turn to Moscow for weapons. The USSR gave significantly higher rate of military aid as the Soviets did before, as the paragraph shows:

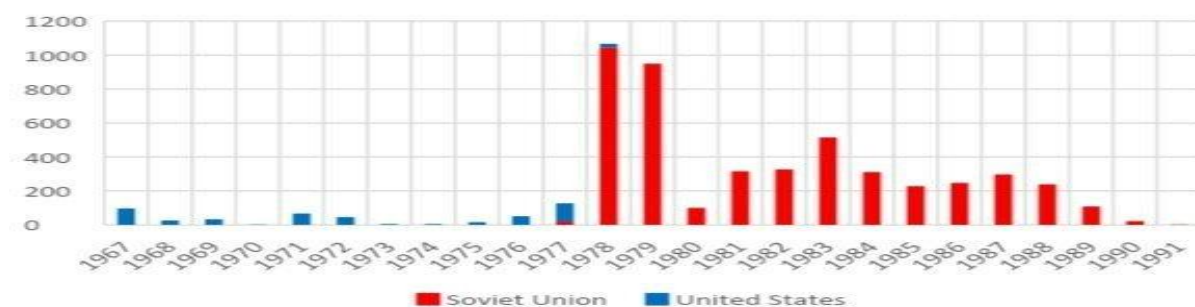


Figure 2: Cold War Foreign Military Aid to Ethiopia in Millions of U.S. Dollars

Source: <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2021/9/3/to-the-last-bullet-the-cold-wars-last-gasps-and-enduring-impact-in-the-horn-of-africa>

Meanwhile the US sought to gain support for Siad Barre's government without a military presence with its foreign policy, although Carter's first statements were contradictory. Siad Barre viewed these developments as an opportunity to achieve his irredentist claims, but he misinterpreted the way of military support. Barre felt confident that even if the Soviets abandoned him after the invasion, the US would quickly step in (Makinda 1985, pp. 134-138). As the paragraph shows Washington gave much lesser military aid as Moscow did before:

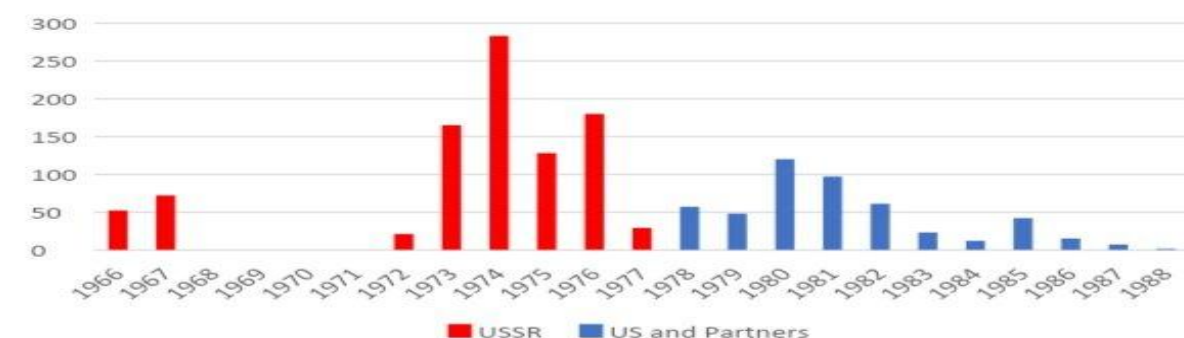


Figure 3: Cold War Foreign Military Aid to Somalia in Millions of U.S. Dollars.

Source: <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2021/9/3/to-the-last-bullet-the-cold-wars-last-gasps-and-enduring-impact-in-the-horn-of-africa>

It is important to note, that the international political scene of the Horn began to exhibit angry protests from neighbouring Kenya, as emerging regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt started supporting Somalia with weapons (Halliday 1977, p. 21). During this period, the Horn became a scene for the confrontation of two ideologies of Cold War, as the US actively promoted democratic values, on the other hand the USSR spread Socialist ideology. No attempts had been made to normalize the inter-state relations. As the US lost Ethiopia after 25 years of domination, its policy became focusing on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The Somali invasion violated Article 3 of the Charter of OAU - and its 1964 Cairo Resolution which sanctifies the African frontiers established during the colonial era.

Following these developments, on 13 November 1977, Siad Barre expelled all Soviet and Cuban diplomats and military advisers, and closed Berbera base, thus Carter recognised Siad's search for external support. He believed in regionalist geopolitics, with the doctrine that outside powers should not get involved in local conflicts. On November 15, the State Department spokesman announced: despite the aggressive intervention there would be no change in the Carter administration's policy of refusing arms to Mogadishu (Jackson 2010, p. 29). The first Cuban troops arrived in December 1977. In January 1978 Moscow proposed a joint mediation regarding the conflict, but Brzezinski had cancelled it (Makinda 1985, pp. 145-149). Siad Barre called on the US to '*fulfil its moral responsibility*', as he received only '*words, just words from the West*' instead of material aid, even after expelling the Soviets.

Through its normalization efforts, the US has planned to cooperate with powerful regional allies like Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Brzezinski believed that the best US response would be a military option with providing extra support to Somalia through proxies. Vance on the other hand felt that the conflict could not be interpreted only in East-West terms, thus military support for Somalia would show an example to other African states that the colonial-inherited borders could be changeable. Therefore, the US should encourage key African countries to solve this problem only within the OAU (Jackson 2010, pp. 29-30).

In this situation Carter used his diplomacy to seek support for Somalia without getting involved in the conflict. Communiques were sent to various Latin American countries to influence Cuba, like to the Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo. On January 25, 1978, Carter sent a letter directly to Brezhnev to seek support of a negotiated solution and to recall both Soviet and Cuban military. The State Department sent a telegram to Fidel Castro via the US Embassy in Cuba requested that the Havana government also support the peace initiatives. In addition, Siad Barre attempted to show the conflict in geopolitical terms to change Carter's mind, but the president maintained his position (Jackson 2010, pp. 30-31).

American allies, like Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan provided only a few weapons to Somalia, Egypt gave some of their old Soviet arms. However, none of these countries wanted actively intervene in the military conflict. In response to this, Kenya, the only American ally in the Horn refused to side with Somalia. In contrary, in



February 1978, Nairobi forced down an Egyptian cargo plane overflying its airspace. Following Somalia's defeat, Carter's attention turned to the Red Sea region, focusing on Egyptian Israeli peace process that culminated in the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 (Makinda 1985, pp. 158-161).

Conclusion

The study has examined the role of Ogaden conflict in the period of détente, through selected publications. In the mid-1970s, after a promising series of agreements, détente began to fall apart. Because the geopolitical stakes were high, first this prompted the superpowers to seek a peaceful solution to the problems to prevent potential spillovers. On the other hand, there have been many mines on the road which could have jeopardised the positive outcome. Despite the common political efforts, mainly ideological differences, geostrategic and military interests explain why the idea of détente has collapsed. Soviet advisors and military flew directly from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa, while Washington has withdrawn support from Ethiopia and realigned their strategic interests with Somalia. The military conflict resulted Ethiopian victory and led to the end of détente. On the other hand, both Barre and Mengistu have manipulated the superpowers' rivalry to boost their local power, which signalled the fragile nature of détente. As argued in this paper, Soviet military intervention was in line with Brezhnev's view, that détente did not rule out East-West competition. On the one hand Soviet interventionism may have to blame, on the other, local assessments played an important role in shaping Moscow's responses to key developments.

However, the Carter Administration experienced many local and external criticism, it was highly accused of lacking the political will to act in the region. It remains unclear, how the outcome of Ogaden conflict could have been represented in American political debates. If it had been perceived to be of more importance to the US at that time, he would have played a more active role, as he could have been contributed to the solving of the conflict more peacefully.

There is no doubt that several sub-problems require further research regarding the role of the president and his advisors. Through analysing various approaches, it can be clearly ensured, that obvious correlation exists between Carter's policy and the rollback of Communist influence. On the other hand, his policy was a failure, because of his inability to sell the new approach of Cold War to wider American public.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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