

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR OGADEN SOMALIS

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This study focuses on the Ogaden Somalis' thrust for freedom of choice in determining their national affiliation (national self-determination) and the effect of regional and international politics upon it. Of all the wars and conflicts raging in Africa today none is as ferocious as that between the Somalia-supported Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and Ethiopia. International attention is again centered on the African Horn; but with contradictory information emerging everyday about the Ogaden war, it is difficult to determine the truth. This article traces the historical roots of the Ogaden dispute, discusses the underlying political issues involved, analyzes policies of major external actors which might affect the outcome, and draws some conclusions.

Historical Background

The Ogaden is the great plateau lying south and south-east of the Ethiopian highlands, within the boundaries of present day Ethiopia. The name derives from the Somali Ogaden clans that inhabit it.

The history of the Ogaden revolution is too involved and complex to be covered in a few pages; but it is essential to attempt at least a capsule history.¹ Since the fourth century the Ethiopian Empire's political history has been dominated by Amhara-Tigreans. From this peasantry based in the northern highlands emerged a military aristocracy whose leaders have stretched their rule by conquest over the centuries, incorporating a host of different peoples and ethnic groups in the process. The limits of Ethiopian power were the limits of effective collection of tribute from subject peoples. During a series of cyclic expansions and withdrawals—because of resistance of other nationalisms—Ethiopia's center of gravity moved steadily southwards, reaching the present capital of Addis Ababa. An important mark in the long history of successful Ethiopian expansion, pertinent to present happenings, occurred in 1527 when the Somali leader Ahmed Guray, in resisting Ethiopian expansionism, came close to extinguishing the culture of the highlands and replacing it throughout the Horn of Africa with a Somali-dominated state. But the Amharas survived this threat with Portuguese support. Thus the Somali struggle for the Ogaden dates from the early sixteenth century since the Ethiopian cannons, supplied by Portugal, enabled it, after repulsing Guray, to gain control of the territory, establishing a base in Harar from which tribute was periodically exacted from the nomads.

European contacts with the Horn, except for the early involvement of the Portuguese, were limited until 1869, when the opening of the Suez Canal focused attention upon the area's strategic importance. The Somali nation, unified by language, religion, culture, and economy and subject to the authority of the elders and the consensus of

the *shir* (assembly of clan members), became a focus of European colonialism. Different Somali areas came under Italian, French, and two types of British rule, as was true elsewhere in Africa. Little respect was paid to the geographical, ethnic and national realities in the Horn. But the Europeans had no monopoly over Somali colonization and partition. The European scramble coincided with consolidation of power in Ethiopia, under Menelik II and the extension of central authority. The expansionist campaigns of the Emperor took place while the Europeans were partitioning the Somali coast.

Menelik's expansion into Somali-inhabited territories began in 1886, soon after the Egyptian withdrawal from Harar. This brought into the open the traditional antagonisms between Somalis and Ethiopians. The Ethiopians forced the Somali ethnic groups to pay tribute and to provide livestock for Ethiopian forces and peasants. But the occupation of the Ogaden was incomplete, for their authority never extended far beyond the scattered military posts established throughout the region.

Italy, having established its control in Eritrea as well as Somalia, sought also to move into Menelik's territory. But the defeat of the Italian army by the Ethiopians at the battle of Adowa in 1896 established them as a force for European powers to reckon with. The following year, 1897, was a banner year for Ethiopia. Each of its European colonial neighbors pressed for Ethiopian friendship, and each contracted for its Somali territorial claims with Ethiopia. This year was a great year for Ethiopians and a black one for the Somalis who were neither consulted before nor informed after the agreements. The Anglo-Ethiopian treaty of 1897 acknowledged Menelik's tenuous claims, based on his recent forays into the Ogaden, although it was not until 1954 that the whole of this territory finally came under Ethiopian control. In 1890 Italy had sponsored Ethiopian participation in the Brussels General Act which empowered Ethiopia as a state to import munitions legally, thus legitimizing the active arms trade it had been carrying on for some years with French merchants. The influx of modern weapons completely destabilized the relationship between indigenous forces. They enabled Menelik to consolidate his control over the plateau as a part of his own imperial mission. In ten years Menelik doubled the size of his kingdom. By the early 1890s, Ethiopians were encroaching on the Somali lands at virtually every potential point of contact. This was in sharp contrast to the years from the middle ages until Menelik's western-armed Ethiopian colonialism, during which Ethiopians had not been able to rule consistently any Somali-occupied territory although from time to

1. For background history of the Ogaden problem, refer to Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); John Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964); Leonard Doob, *Resolving Conflict in Africa* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1970); and I. M. Lewis, *Modern History of Somali Land* (New York: Praeger, 1965).

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time it succeeded in exacting payment of tribute from one or another nomadic clan.

One form of Somali resistance to Ethiopian and European colonialism was the revolt led by the Somali national hero and poet, Sayid Mohamed Abdulla Hassan. From 1900 to 1920 he fought all invaders, Ethiopian, British, Italian. He held the British at bay for twenty years by his great tactical ability and political skill. His aim was the liberation of all Somalis from every alien power. A convention between Italy and Ethiopia in 1908 made boundaries clear in certain areas but vague in others.

Thus from 1897 to 1935, with this exception, the colonial powers retained their political frontiers dividing the Somali people. The 1936 Italo-Ethiopian war, escalating from the Walwal incident (involving dispute over Somali wells and pastures), resulted in Italy over-running Ethiopia, and subsequent to the outbreak of war in Europe, British Somaliland as well. All the Somalis, except those in northern Kenya and French Somaliland, were placed under one administration. When the Second World War ended, power passed from the Italians to the British military administration, which was in de facto control of all the Somali lands. It would have been a propitious time to unite this culturally, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous nation and Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, in 1946, did propose such union (one of the few occasions of British departure from anti-Somali policies). But his vision carried little weight with the Ethiopians as the French, and the territories, by 1950, returned to the *status quo ante*. Bevin's proposal was flawed by the provisions requiring Ethiopian agreement and proposing a British trusteeship. Due to big power politics within the four power commission (Britain, France, the U.S., the USSR) and the deference to Ethiopian claims over Somali interests, the plan failed. More crucially, set against the favorable omens of a unified Somali nation, was the return of Haile Selassie, the anointed martyr of fascist aggression, cloaking his own ambitions over Eritrean and Somali territories in the rhetoric of liberation and resurrection.

After ceding the Ogaden in 1948 to Ethiopia but retaining certain residual rights of supervision over Somali clans pasturing transiently in the "Haud," an eastern section of the Ogaden, the British government made a last futile effort to fulfill its original protective treaties with the Somalis by offering to purchase the southern and western grazing areas of the Somali clans. The colonially ambitious Haile Selassie rejected the idea.

Somali nationalism fought unsuccessfully against an overpowering flow of events, which resulted in administrative control of the Ogaden by Ethiopia. Fruitless petitions to the four power commission and to Her Majesty's government by such Somali nationalist groups as the Somali Youth League (formerly Somali Youth Club) and the National United Front bore no fruit. The Somalis ruled by Britain and Italy fought and won their independence in 1960, uniting these territories soon afterwards. The new Somali

state on the border of Ethiopia, by virtue of its very existence, excited the nationalist sentiment of all Somalis and encouraged political expression and expansion. The Somalis, not having participated in the agreements Ethiopia made with other colonial powers, considered them no basis for discussion. It is no wonder the Somalis in the Ogaden do not see themselves as Ethiopians and it is just a matter of when, how and at what cost they will achieve freedom.

Basic Issues

Since Somali independence the Ogaden border has been the scene of more or less regular conflict. There have been a number of reported and unreported skirmishes between Somali and Ethiopian troops since 1960. Throughout, Ethiopia has complained that the Somali-state has instigated trouble in Ogaden, while the Somali government has always held that Ogaden Somalis were fighting for their independence. In 1961 and again in 1964, Somalia and Ethiopia seemed to tremble on the edge of full-scale war. Military units met in bloody combat on the border. Naturally in each case both sides traced the violence to an aggressive intrusion by the other.

But as we mentioned earlier, the disputes between the Somalis and the Ethiopians are not modern. The Western Somali Liberation Front expressed aspirations in the sixties and seventies which are centuries old. The recent rupture in relations between Somalia and Ethiopia is again over the dispute in the Ogaden — an area ecologically, economically and in habitation an integral part of the grazing lands of the Somali people.

Throughout, the Ethiopian government (including that of Mengistu) has tried to restrict international discussions on the problem of the Ogaden to the legal interpretation of colonial boundary treaties and agreements — particularly those of 1897 and 1908 between Ethiopia and Italy and Britain — which the Somalis took no part in. Secondly, Ethiopians argue that their country is a multi-national state, and if they let one nationality secede then the country could be entirely dismembered. Finally, and unashamedly, the economic argument is used. The Ogaden, it is held, has significant potential economic importance to Ethiopia.²

The Somalis, on the other hand, argue that the most cru-

2. Reading Leonard W. Doob, "Fermeda Workshop: Resolving Conflict in Africa," one finds a fourth argument used by some Ethiopians and Kenyans present at the Fermeda workshop. It is sad that the organizers in their own suggestions take this point into consideration. The argument goes something like this: if the Ethiopians and Kenyans are to give up Ogaden and the NFD, then Somalia must give up a part of its own land in exchange. The authors of the book in their suggested solution to establishment of joint administration areas, go along with this point of view. But the argument is close to the absurd. It is as if the European colonial powers were to ask in exchange for independence to African countries, that they should part with sections of their countries. There is no quarrel over any territory now part of the Somali Republic and it would be senseless to introduce one where none exists.

cial and pertinent principle in deciding the fate of the Ogaden is the attitudes of the Somali nomads who inhabit it. They argue that the only reason Ogaden is separated from other Somalis is that those lands were given to Ethiopia by colonial powers, and Ethiopia itself has and is practicing colonialism. Also the Somalis argue that what is recognized in the Ethiopian fears of dismemberment is the presence of total disunity under Amharic domination of other nationalities. The call for unity is a mask for Amharic domination. Finally, the Somalis state that the Ogaden has no strategic value and no buried riches which could be of economic benefit to Ethiopia; they believe this is only a hoax used by the Ethiopian government to dampen Somali aspirations of liberation.

External Involvement

In addition to Ethiopian objections, two external political considerations; the Organization of African Unity and superpower rivalry might continue to hamper self-determination for Ogaden Somalis. But international support for United Nations ideas of self-determination and the Somalis' resolve to liberate themselves, could lead to the Ogaden being free.

OAU and UN

Early African leaders—before the OAU was formed—called for adjustment or abolition of frontiers drawn by imperialist powers to divide the peoples of Africa at an early date based upon the true wishes of the people. The first Afro-Asian solidarity conference in Cairo (1957) accepted a Somali resolution condemning all forms of colonialism, which by implication could include Ethiopian rule in Ogaden. A resolution of the All-African Peoples Conference in Accra in December 1958: "denounces artificial frontiers drawn by imperialist powers to divide peoples of the same stocks; calls for the abolition or adjustment of such frontiers at an early date; calls upon the independent states of Africa to support a permanent solution to this problem founded upon the wishes of the people."³

The second All-African Peoples Conference in Tunis (1960): "Hails and supports the struggle of the people of Somaliland for independence and unity in order to give birth to bigger Somalia."⁴ There was thus a reasonable expectation early on that the frontiers which imperial powers had created would be swept away and that the maps of Africa would be redrawn to meet their own needs and conceptions. Instead, with the rarest of exceptions, the colonially established frontiers have remained, and the African states which have taken their place in the international society are the precise heirs of the colonial regimes.

Since it came into being in 1963, the OAU could have eliminated some of the seeds of discord and wars, had it attempted to redraw some frontiers which divide many natural groupings into two, three or even more different

parts. But Article 1 of the OAU charter, and more specifically paragraph 3 of Article 3, stipulate that the existing frontiers of the colonial states—therefore the colonial frontiers—shall be held. The failure to deal with chronic conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden must squarely be placed on the unaccommodating rigidity of paragraph 3 of Article 3, even more formalized in July 1964 when the OAU formally accepted the resolution that all member states pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of independence. The OAU is structured in such a way as to prevent the fulfillment of the Somali aspirations. Not only does the charter protect the colonial borders, but it is also the case that Ethiopia was central to the founding of the organization and became the site of its permanent headquarters; it therefore was able to exert more influence. Ethiopia also has been able to capitalize on African leaders who themselves are pledged to respect the colonial boundaries existing on the achievement of national independence from European powers. Unfortunately the oppressed African minorities and nationalities—like the Somalis and Eritreans—were not represented in the OAU meeting halls. Then OAU's upholding of the colonial legacy of arbitrary boundaries only meant to oppressed nationalities its abdication of responsibilities to the masses colonized by Africans. Saadia Touval states:

A logical corollary of the (1964) resolution would be that attempts to change the status quo by groups claiming the right of self-determination were to be rejected.⁵

The OAU has a duty to show more positive interest and take bolder steps to see the Ogaden problem resolved quickly; especially since it argues that African problems should be resolved within the OAU forum. The 1977 emergency meeting of the OAU mediators in Gabon, called by Ethiopia, was hopelessly deadlocked, because Ethiopia would not even allow the participation of WSLF. The OAU must present just proposals for permanent settlement of the conflict and must have all parties to the conflict represented in any negotiations for peace. For all African people, not only heads of states, to identify with the OAU, it is high time the inviolability of the colonial boundaries are abandoned. The Somali case is unique—nowhere in Africa has a large culturally homogeneous nation such as the Somali people been so divided by colonial boundaries.

A new look at the boundaries of Africa's sovereign states is not as revolutionary an idea as it might seem at first glance. But if the OAU could be persuaded to rethink especially paragraph 3 of Article 3 and its 1964 resolution, it

3. Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 231.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

5. Saadia Touval, *The Boundary Politics of Independent Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 90.

might be the start of a new move to reduce the strife of the continent. Changed boundaries when they are about to bring justice and self-determination, as in the Ogaden case, would induce peace and not anarchy. The problems of the Horn bear similarity to other nationality questions that, for example, bedeviled Europeans for generations. Europe itself, after the emergence of modern nationalism there, underwent considerable shuffling of boundaries in order to make states conform to nations. The map of Europe has been redrawn more than once and is now—with the exception of pockets of ethnic and linguistic dissent more cohesive in terms of national units than before the two world wars.

The Somali position is supported, obviously, by the rights collated under the heading of self-determination that have been endorsed not only by all nationalists but also by the United Nations charter, and repeatedly by the General Assembly which in Resolution 545 of February 5, 1952, pronounced that the covenant on human rights must contain the provision that "all peoples shall have the right of self-determination." In effect, in the draft of the covenants of human rights presented in 1964 to the United Nations, article One affirms the "right of peoples to self-determination,"⁶ thus giving the principle priority even over the historic rights of man of which the United Nations set forth in its declarations of 1948. The Ogaden Somali demands are thus in accordance with present international law that recognizes the right to self-determination for people under colonialism.

The U.S.

The conflict also goes beyond the Horn and African politics. The parties depend on arms from the superpowers, and the superpowers have been competing for influence among the nations in the Horn.

The U.S. involvement in the Horn of Africa has always been motivated by the same concern which has been the principal preoccupation of American foreign policy since the second World War—the containment of Russian influence. As a member of the four-power commission appointed to determine the disposition of the former Italian colonies, the U.S. along with Britain and France agreed on the desirability of excluding Soviet influence from the territories in question, but otherwise maintained at various times divergent views about the future, especially of the Somalis. While trying to be friendly to both Somalia and Ethiopia, it nevertheless tilted toward Ethiopia, which, by participating in the Korean War and providing facilities for an American military communications station in Asmara, assured itself of American military support. In the early 1960s the U.S. refused to support the establishing of a strong Somali army; offers of the U.S. and other western aid for the development of a small Somali army in 1963 were turned down by the Somalis as inadequate. The aid

for building a strong army was then procured from Russia. The Somali police, however, were largely financed by the U.S. from 1958 to 1969. But western—more particularly American—refusal to arm the Somalis left a void which gave Russia an opportunity to move in and build up Somalia militarily.

The Americans, during the 1960s, attempted to defuse Somali nationalism. They tried to double-deal with Ethiopia and Somalia, while being the major arms supplier only to Ethiopia. The Somalis at first tried to play the Soviet Union off against the United States, both to minimize the big powers' role in the Ethiopian-Somali conflict and in order to secure for themselves a substantial amount of aid. Non-alignment succeeded for a while, but Prime Minister Egal's manipulations of Somali elections and politics, in his desire for Somalia to become allied to the U.S., tipped the balancing act in favor of the Russians. The military takeover reversed Somali non-alignment which was being manipulated to become pro-west and unsupportive of Somali aspirations of the Ogaden and Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

The Americans have not taken a position on the Somali desires for self-determination in the Horn. Their primary aim for the most part is still based on power considerations and not on the justice of the regional issues involved. Thus the Carter Administration's futile maneuverings⁷ are highlighted by total lack of imaginative and just solutions to the Horn issues and obsession with power considerations. Burt states: "fearing that Somalia might begin to prosecute territorial claims against Kenya . . . the Administration decided in late August it would not go ahead with the arms deal." He continues: "more important than these changes, however, appears to be a decision by the Administration to allow area specialists to have a greater role in making policy. These specialists argue that Ethiopia, despite its difficulties, remains the most important country in the area."⁸

Obsession with Ethiopian importance and Kenyan friendship will obstruct the U.S. from taking a leadership role in an issue that will not go away easily and that could mean disaster for the Horn and the world at large. For its short-run interest and support of Kenya and concern with a geographical expression of Ethiopia, the U.S. policy is coming against the just cause of Somalis in the Ogaden in their desire for self-determination. The U.S. can lose little by supporting the Somali position for self-determination; it would not be suffering the enraged opinions of oppressed masses; it would undermine Russia's social imperialism; and it would find allies in international assemblies by going back to Wilsonian principles.

6. "All people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

7. See Richard Burt, "U.S. is Avoiding Big Involvement in Africa's Horn." *The New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1977.

8. *Ibid.*

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The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union participated after World War II in the deliberations on the future of the Italian colonies, through the four-power commission and in the general assembly of the U.N. Its position during the protracted negotiations in the council of foreign ministers and the United Nations was not wholly a consistent one. But it was opposed to the "Bevin Plan," the only proposal which envisaged the unification of the former Italian colony, British Somaliland, and the Ogaden. Russia was more concerned with being party to the war loot and playing power politics with the allied power than caring for any rights of colonial subjects. Soviet interest in Ethiopia at this time also resulted in the total disregard of Somali concerns. The Soviet non-recognition of the Somali Youth League (formerly Somali Youth Club) only changed in 1949. Since the independence of the Somali state, the Russians have maintained neutrality on the Ogaden issue, though after the military coup in 1969, and Somalia's adoption of scientific socialism as an ideology, the USSR came to build up the Somali military. But like the U.S., the Russians never really assessed the Ogaden cause and struggle for independence on its own merits. They are no less power hungry, if not more, than the U.S.

In recent months, the Soviet Union made a blunder by trying to impose its own will on Ogaden Somalis, Eritreans and progressive Ethiopians who are opposing Mengistu's government. Moscow's gamble in the Horn was to try to consolidate itself with the present regime in Ethiopia without alienating oppressed nationalities and masses. But its covert support for Eritrean movements and overt support for Somalia meant remaining distant from the Dergue. So in May 1976, the Soviet Union, in a critical decision, reversed its previous policy of support for the Eritreans, supporting the Dergue's "nine-point plan," which promised a form of autonomy to the Eritreans, but which fell well short of full independence. In February 1977 it agreed to lend its support to Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. On the Ogaden front, the Russians attempted a conciliation by using podgorny and especially Castro, who on March 6, 1977 brought Mengistu and Siad Barre together at a secret meeting in Aden. But the so-called conciliation, more of Soviet imposed solution, essentially involved Somalia's giving up the Ogaden. Siad turned this down, since he could not even speak for the WSLF. At the time the USSR was assumed to be trying to mediate a peace in the "Ogaden," Moscow was airlifting weapons into Ethiopia. Mengistu had signed an agreement with Moscow for the supply of nearly 800 million dollars worth of Soviet weapons, including tanks, helicopters, transport planes and hundreds of thousands of small arms. By now it is clear Russia has opted for standing by Mengistu's government and for his April 1976 program. The Soviets have thus openly come out against the rights of oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia. The Kremlin has made its support

for Ethiopia and resentment at Somalia's role in the fighting, steadily more explicit:

Leonoid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, has criticized Somalia for supporting ethnic Somali guerrillas who have invaded Ethiopia.

In a toast at a luncheon yesterday for President Agostinho Neto of Angola, the Soviet leader urged African nations to respect each other's borders, no matter how unjustly they were drawn by the colonial powers.⁹

Not only does this statement show a support for Dergue, but it distorts and does not even acknowledge the WSLF (Western Somali Liberation Front) that is doing the fighting in the Ogaden. The Soviets, like Mengistu, accuse the Front of merely being an extension of the regular Somali army and sanction the unjust colonial frontiers that are the root of the problems in the Horn. If one examines the reasons why the Kremlin opts for Ethiopia, one fails to see other reasons than power considerations. It is clear the USSR chooses to support Ethiopia in order to replace the U.S. in a country supposedly large in population and geographic size (assuming all its nationalities want to be part of it) and which has traditionally exerted considerable political influence throughout Africa—as the host of the OAU. The Soviets seem firmly and wholeheartedly committed to Mengistu's regime; the enormous amount of military aid promised, the speeded up deliveries, and the continuous haranguing of the Soviet press and praise for what they call the Ethiopian revolution are all good indications of Soviet commitment to Mengistu's regime.

There is no sign that even a substantial injection of Soviet arms and Cuban advisors can help reverse Addis Ababa's disastrous military fortunes. And in the sense that Soviets and Cubans agreed to go in with fascist oppression, it will be a new chapter of African historiography by the Soviets who for reasons of *real politik* have opted to support their enemy Mengistu and his Dergue. But the Soviets might have courted disaster: with Oromo, Somali, and Eritrean struggles for independence, with Tigreans fighting to reassert their former autonomy; with the progressive Amhara civilian opposition as represented in the EPRP; the Kremlin has no basis for supporting a reactionary government that has alienated people everywhere. In Africa, the Soviet involvement with Ethiopia's ever-widening conflict could only lead to the unmasking of its imperialist adventures in Africa. The Soviet initiative to impose Ethiopian unity without regard to the Horn politics will only backfire. Neither the Somalis in the Ogaden, nor the Eritreans would stop short of their demands for independence. Fidel Castro's unimaginative support for Moscow's proposals indicates a simplistic Marxist view that finds it unthinkable

9. "Brezhnev Criticizes Somalia Over Fighting." In *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 1977, p. A10C.

10. "And in Ethiopia" in *U.S. News and World Report*, August 29, 1977, p. 45.

that two socialist states would have problems. They fail to offer constructive solutions to the bedrock problems of neighboring nationalisms in the Horn. Instead of supporting Lenin's progressive ideas of self-determination, they are pedalling Stalin's fascist integration.

Ethiopia and Somalia have broken off diplomatic relations with each other. Obviously, an attempt by Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia would widen the Ogaden conflict and would open all-out war between the two states. In the meantime, the Ogaden war goes on and Somali Ogaden nationalism confronts Ethiopia with the challenge of letting the Somali populated region be free. One correspondent quoting a foreign analyst states: "Mengistu will never compromise. It is not in his nature. If this campaign fails, the Dergue will have to eliminate him if there is to be a negotiated solution."¹⁰

The Ogaden Somalis are not betting on Mengistu to come to terms with their demands for self-determination. They see the ruthless and barbaric massacring of Amharic masses themselves as one indication of the insensitivity and oppressiveness of Mengistu's regime. It is unwise to bank fully on the program EPRP (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party); but in the sense that they in their manifesto recognize the right of the various national groups within Ethiopia to determine their own future and even secede, there is hope the dispute in the Ogaden could be resolved peacefully if EPRP ever attained power. Until its realization, and until there is a basis for negotiations, the Ogaden Somalis, represented by the WSLF, will fight for their independence. Colonialism is not identified by accident of geography or color. Ethiopia, like the European powers that have now completed the decolonization of Somali territories, must give up its colonial aggrandizement.

Externally, the Dergue has acquired the Soviet bloc for support in its colonialism. In Angola the Russian involvement was overlooked mainly because of South African in-

terventionist adventures. The Soviets seem to have now unmasked their imperialism in Africa by siding with a regime that has been condemned the world over for its barbarism and its attempts to stifle the desires of freedom by nationalities in Ethiopia. But because of Somalia's refusal to disassociate itself from Russia for lack of a viable alternate arms-supplier, the USSR seems hung in the worst way. The balancing act of the Russians between Somalia and Ethiopia parallels the problem Cyprus posed for the U.S.; but as Jean-Claude Guillebaud argues, Ogaden could become a red Vietnam for the Russians.¹¹

The announced even-handed policy of U.S. military non-involvement in the Horn politics might seem wise in that it avoids imposing upon the local issues a superpower politics interpretation. But in the sense that this policy is partially dictated by U.S. support of Kenya against Northern Frontier District Somali demands, the U.S. policies are not neutral at all. U.S. policy fails to come to terms with the Somali demands for self-determination in both the Ogaden and Kenya's Northern Frontier province.

Internationally, Somalis feel the OAU as a regional African organization has jurisdiction over the Horn problems. But if the OAU refuses to recognize the rights of oppressed nationalities within colonial states, then it could lead to its ineffectiveness as a peacemaker, and the oppressed might be forced to go over its head to the U.N. The OAU must recognize that the principle of self-determination applies with equal vigor to all peoples, dependent or independent. Due to the absence of basic human rights, including political, economic, and cultural rights, and due to the unworkability of relations between Somalis and Amhara dominated society, the Somalis claim the right to self-determination. Sanctity of Ethiopian territorial boundaries should not be carried to the extent that it contradicts human rights.

11. Jean-Claude Guillebaud, "Red Vietnam in the Making?" In *Manchester Guardian*, July 10, 1977, p. 10.

GUEST EDITORIALS FOR THE APRIL-JUNE ISSUE

TOPIC: Reconciliation in the Horn
Readers are invited to write short, thought-provoking commentaries on this important topic. We will consider them for publication in the next issue. Please include your name, address and telephone number.