

REBELLION AND SEPARATISM IN ETHIOPIA: HOW SHOULD THE WEST RESPOND?

The pro-Communist military regime in Ethiopia—the *Derg*—has been beset by a bewildering array of regional and ethnic rebellions and separatist movements. The regime faced its greatest crisis in 1977–78 when rebels gained almost complete control of the northern province of Eritrea while Somalia overran the Ogaden region in the east. A Soviet-Cuban rescue operation blunted and then defeated the Somali invasion. Subsequently, a Soviet-supported offensive enabled the Derg to reestablish its hold on Eritrea. The situation there has been essentially stalemated ever since.

Eritrean and other separatist movements in Ethiopia and in exile have prompted Western policymakers to question Ethiopia's viability as a nation. Conservative critics have berated the United States for failing to take effective action in 1977–78 to forestall the "loss" of Ethiopia. They now claim that the United States is missing an opportunity to recoup its losses by failing to support Ethiopian resistance movements.

Paul Henze, who has more than 20 years' experience in Horn of Africa affairs, talked with numerous Ethiopian exiles in the United States and Europe and traveled extensively within Ethiopia in 1984. His analysis of Ethiopian separatism and possible Western support for it was sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. His conclusions are as follows.

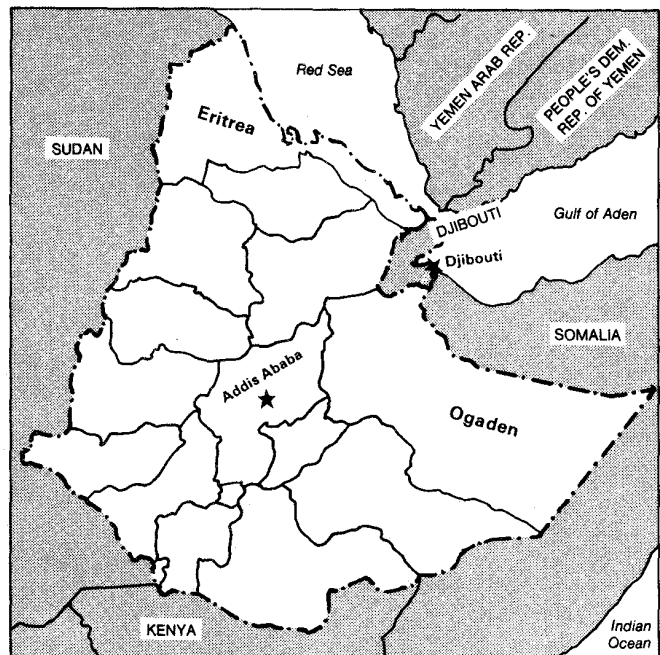
A Unique Situation

There is some validity to critiques of American inaction at the beginning of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, when we might indeed have influenced its course. By 1977, there were no realistic options. If we had backed the Somali invasion or the Eritrean insurgency, we would have isolated ourselves with little likelihood of leverage on Horn events without major military commitments. We would have abandoned a long-standing policy of recognition of the Ethiopian state for no clear gain.

Ethiopia is an atypical African country. One of the oldest states in the world, it owes its boundaries not to colonial powers but to its own sense of nationhood and its rulers' ability to manipulate colonial rivals. Ethiopia's geographic and ethnic diversity should not be mistaken

for fundamental fragility. In crisis, its peoples rally, as they did in 1977–78.

The situation in Ethiopia does not parallel that in Afghanistan, where the United States is supporting rebels against a Soviet-backed regime. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan; it did not invade Ethiopia. In contrast to the puppet Afghan leadership, the Ethiopian regime can maintain itself in power without overt foreign support. Afghan dissidents want a unified Afghanistan; most of the Ethiopian resistance movements are separatist. The Afghan rebels are averse to Marxism; many of the Ethiopian separatists embrace it. A broad coalition of Free and Third World countries sympathizes with and in various ways supports the Afghan resistance. Support for Ethiopian separatists, on the other hand, would put us at odds with most of Africa, the rest of the Third World, and almost all of our allies. It would leave the Soviets to pose as champions of Ethiopia's territorial integrity. Finally, it would demoralize the great majority of Ethiopians who are not active supporters of the present regime and who are almost all residually pro-American.



ETHIOPIA

A Constructive Western Policy

Avoiding active support of separatism does not mean that we should restrict our activities in Ethiopia to alleviating the present food crisis. Such action helps the Derg survive without facing up to the implications of its mistaken policies and without feeling full pressure for change. Neither should we completely avoid dialogue with dissident and rebel movements. There have been some recent indications that some of the separatist fronts may be modifying their positions. Resistance with the ultimate aim of reinforcing national unity is worthy of consideration for selective support.

We do not need to decide whether a Derg with new policies would be better than a complete change of regime, but we should make certain fundamentals clear. Doing so will accelerate political processes that are already in motion in Ethiopia. **These should be the main elements in our policy:**

- To press for basic change in overall economic policy, especially with respect to agriculture.
- To make clear that we will be supportive of an Ethiopian government that adopts a new course by
 - resuming development aid on a significant scale
 - encouraging American private investment
 - considering resumption of military aid.
- To be straightforward about certain political principles:
 - We recognize and support maintaining Ethiopia's territorial integrity.
 - We encourage measures that will give disaffected regions of the country a say in their local affairs.
 - We stand ready to facilitate mediation of quarrels with neighboring countries, such as Somalia and Sudan.

A Regional Framework

There is a larger framework in which an openly declared, honest U.S. policy toward Ethiopia and the other countries of the Horn of Africa can expect eventually to be effective and gain broader Free World support. **We need have no hesitancy in pointing out that more than 20 years of active Soviet involvement in the Horn have brought nothing but hardship and disaster** for the peoples of the region. More weapons of any kind is what the Horn needs least. The region bristles with arms, but all its peoples and leaders enjoy less elementary security than they did 25 years ago. **The Horn needs honest mediation of its quarrels and mutual security arrangements that permit all the peoples in the area to concentrate on economic development.** All these governments should be pressured to stop regimenting their farmers and provide them the minimal prerequisites they need to produce and sell. Free agriculture, with genuine state support of private initiative, can generate export surpluses in the Horn.

The peoples of the Horn know that Marxism-Leninism, "scientific socialism," and all kindred dogmas are hollow. The doctrines that titillated their older brothers half a generation ago have no serious appeal to students at Addis Ababa University today. When they have a chance, this new generation of Ethiopians will loosen themselves from the incomplete and now faltering grip of the Derg and begin moving forward. U.S. policy should help expedite this process.