

Somalia Breaks With Soviet Union, Cuba

On Nov. 13 the Somali government renounced its treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, ended Soviet use of naval facilities, ordered all Soviet advisors to leave within seven days, and broke diplomatic relations with Cuba.

The dramatic move by the Somalis, reached after a 10-hour meeting of the central committee of the Somali ruling party, comes in the wake of Somali military reversals in attempt to annex large sections of neighboring Ethiopia. Somalia is blaming the defeats on increasing Soviet and Cuban aid to Ethiopia. The Somali move, probably taken to gain arms from the West, leaves the Somalis with a precarious internal situation.

Since the Organization of African Unity condemned the Somali attempt to grab the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, using the ill-disguised Western Somali Liberation Front, any arms provided directly or indirectly to Somalia by a Western nation will be regarded by the OAU as an imperialist effort to arm a group that is attacking a fellow African country.

France, Britain, and the U.S. refused Somali requests

for arms so long as the Somali attacks against Ethiopia continued. Informed African sources report that the expected Africa-wide denunciation of the West for any future arms shipments to Somalia would undermine Western initiatives elsewhere in Africa. It would also intersect circles in Somalia, that, after eight years of close cooperation between the Soviets and poverty-stricken Somalia, opposed the move to break with the Soviets.

The same sources indicate that the Soviets, while trying to avoid this eventuality, took this development in stride. Despite the widespread press accounts of the Somali break as a severe blow to the USSR, the only comment the Soviets made is to attribute the break to Somali anger over the Soviet refusal to back the country's expansionist moves. "Essentially, behind this action lies dissatisfaction because the Soviet Union did not support Somalia's territorial claims on a neighboring state and refused to facilitate the stirring of fratricidal war in the Horn of Africa..." the Soviet news agency, Tass, reported today.

The Somalia Story: A Year Of Diplomatic Warfare

The Somali Government's expulsion of Soviet advisors and breaking of relations with Cuba comes after more than a year of behind-the-scenes warfare between the socialist and nonaligned countries on one side, and Atlanticist and City of London factions on the other. The real fight is not the "East-West conflict over the strategic Red Sea," but whether the Horn of Africa and neighboring Arabian countries will settle their disputes in the context of developing the region's enormous food-producing potential. Or will the region remain balkanized, tension-ridden and impoverished, useful only as a pawn in the British Crown's struggle to retain control over the Middle East?

Here are the salient features of the last year's diplomatic warfare.

Assault on Ethiopia

After the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime in Ethiopia in 1975. Atlanticist policy toward that country was aimed at keeping the ruling military Council, or Derg, under U.S. control either directly or through the

widespread network of American agents in the country. The policy provided for manipulating Ethiopia's terror of being cut off from the sea by hostile Arab states. The "peasant holy war" against the secessionist movement in Ethiopia's coastal province of Eritrea exemplifies this policy organized by American agent and cochairman of the Military Council Atnafu Abate, in May 1976. Not only did the "holy war" result in the widespread massacre of civilians; it also destroyed attempts being made at negotiation by the man who is now Ethiopian head of state Mengistu Haile Mariam. (Abate was finally uncovered and executed only last week.)

In September 1976 the American command structure to destabilize Ethiopia was upgraded by the appointment of G. McMurtrie Godley as U.S. Ambassador. Godley is well known for the key role he played in keeping a succession of American puppet regimes in power in Zaire, and as American ambassador to Lebanon during the first months of the Lebanese civil war.

This culminated in a February 1977 coup attempt in Ethiopia which was intended to throw out Mengistu. Instead, Mengistu took power for the pro-Soviet faction against the pro-American and Maoist circles.

Peace Initiative

In *February, March and April 1977*, a major diplomatic initiative was launched which involved the Soviet Union, Cuba, Yugoslavia, and Tanzania, along with other nonaligned countries. In early *March*, Cuban President Fidel Castro toured Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia, shuttling twice between the latter two countries, in an attempt to settle the increasing border disputes between them, while emphasizing the new world economic order and development of the region as the basis for an amicable settlement. Castro's visit came soon after the Yugoslavian Foreign Minister Milos Minic visited Ethiopia and Somalia on a similar mission.

Castro's basic proposal to Ethiopia and Somalia was a federation between the two countries and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, all pro-Soviet socialist countries at that time. The federation would have subsumed the question of the disputed Ogaden desert — which is juridically part of Ethiopia but inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis.

While Somali President Mohammed Siad Barre has proposed similar accommodations to the Ethiopians, the reply he gave to Castro clearly illustrated the dilemma of even prosocialist Somali leaders: Any Somali leader that gave up Somali claims to the Ogaden desert, Barre told Castro, would be immediately overthrown.

Atlanticist Counteroffensive

The large right-wing Muslim chauvinist faction in Somalia that Siad Barre capitulated to last week, was the lever used for Britain's defeat of the pro-Soviet faction. A campaign was mounted soon after the joint diplomatic offensive of Cuba, the USSR, and the non-aligned countries. The campaign began with President Carter's much publicized phone conversation with a top advisor in *April*, "overheard" by CBS-TV: "I want you to tell Cy and Zbig," said Carter, mugging for the cameras, "that I want them to move in every possible way to get Somalia to be our friend."

Tension was heightened in *June* with the independence of the French colony-naval base of Djibouti, which lies between Ethiopia and Somalia. Djibouti's independence was accompanied by a French military buildup in the colony in anticipation of fighting between the two countries. This went in tandem with a "red scare" in the American and British press centered on an arms deal negotiated between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union after the U.S. cut off arms supplies to the beleaguered regime, during Mengistu's *May 1977* trip to Moscow, and over the Soviet Union's overtures to the Eritrean secessionists on behalf of the Ethiopian government. This peace initiative was identified in a Library of Congress report as part of a "new, more belligerent Soviet approach to the Third World." President Nemeiry, predicting an Ethiopian incursion into the secessionist province, massed Sudanese troops on the Sudan-Ethiopia border in early *June* and threatened to invade the country, declaring full support for the Eritrean secessionists.

This rapid buildup of American-sponsored provocations against Ethiopia led the Soviet Union to issue a strong warning *June 5* "denouncing,"... the actions of those circles who are preparing an aggression against Ethiopia as well as those who are pushing them to this dangerous course. Those who engage in it will bear a grave responsibility to the peoples of Africa and the whole world."

Under pressure from the chauvinist faction, Somalian President Barre also criticized the Soviet Union in *May*, although insisting that Soviet arms supplies to Ethiopia would have no effect on relations with the USSR, and attempting to broach the subject of a federation with the Ethiopians. Siad declared in an interview with the French biweekly *Afrique-Asie* that "our relations with the Soviet Union are stamped with solidarity and profound friendship..." The French daily *Le Monde*, at the same time, circulated rumors that pro-Soviet officers in the Somali army were preparing to overthrow Siad.

The War Begins

In *late June*, the right-wing chauvinists in Somalia started forcing Siad's hand, urging the "Western Somali (Ogaden desert) Liberation Front (WSLF) to begin major sabotage operations in Ethiopia. Several major railbridges linking Addis Ababa to the sea at Djibouti were blown up at the same time that Siad was calling for a "strong and active anti-imperialist front" with Ethiopia.

The escalated WSLF activities convinced the Ethiopians that the Somalis were not interested in peace. Although the Organization of African Unity tried to mediate the conflict and Africa universally condemned Somalia's actions, by the end of *July* the rebellion in the Ogaden amounted to an outright invasion.

As the Somali Army, disguised as the Western Somali Liberation Front, swept across the undefended Ogaden desert, the Soviet Union took a strong stand against a "fratricidal war," and shipped enormous quantities of arms to Ethiopia to stem the Somali onslaught, increasing diplomatic pressure on Somalia to call off the invasion. The Soviets also arranged the presence of delegations from both Somalia and Ethiopia in Moscow in *mid-August*, where they tried to instigate negotiations. Siad himself traveled to Moscow for talks on *Aug. 28*, and the Soviets flatly demanded that he pull Somali troops out of the Ogaden desert.

Stalemate

With the Somali invasion stalled in the mountains at the northern end of the Ogaden due to the quick Soviet response to Ethiopian requests for arms, the right-wing Somali's scenario for cutting ties with the Soviets and turning to the West by *September* fell flat. In particular, American offers of arms and equipment to replace Soviet supplies had to be withdrawn when the Ogaden war continued, since the U.S. could not be caught supplying the Somalis in a war condemned throughout Africa.

By *Sept. 20*, Somalia was ready to negotiate, and a

close associate and representative of Siad, Dr. Mohammed Aden announced in a Rome press conference on that day that Somalia has "no interest in pursuing this war. Our objective is to arrive at negotiations on the future of the Somali population (of the Ogaden)... without compromising our relations with Ethiopia." Aden again offered a confederation proposal to the Ethiopians.

Treachery

By the end of *September*, however, Somalia had managed to break the stalemate and capture the

strategically important town of Jijiga and the even more crucial Marda Pass beyond it. The town and the pass were lost when the division of the Army defending them mutinied at a crucial moment and retreated, giving the Somalis a victory through treachery which they could not otherwise have won.

With the stalemate broken for the moment, the reactionary war faction in Somalia managed to successively force the capitulation of Siad to their demand that the Somali "fatherland" be held, with the corollary that Somalia break with the Soviets, a decision they finally rammed through last week.