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The Dynamics of China — Ethiopia Relations during the Ogaden War, 1977—1978

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Abstract. This study examines superpower competition in the Horn of Africa during the Ogaden War (1977—1978). It deals mainly with China's response to the Ogaden War. The author uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary research sources were collected from various agencies and institutions such as the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), and periodicals using memoirs, speeches, and correspondence exchanges. Secondary sources are gathered from published and unpublished sources. The study defines conventional wisdom about superpower and Chinese intervention in the Horn of Africa during the Ogaden War; it seeks to highlight the complex interplay of real China's foreign policy toward the Horn of Africa. It also describes China's perspectives on policy in Africa and its response to the Ogaden War. The study claims that the Soviet Union's influence in the Horn of Africa generally draws China into regional affairs. Indeed, Soviet influence in the Horn of Africa shifted the Ogaden War into an international dimension. Thus, the study concludes that China's reaction to the Horn events was primarily aimed at leveling out the Soviet Union's sphere of influence in the region.

Key words: Cold War, Horn of Africa, Ogaden War, China's reaction, Mengistu Hailemariam


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Развитие китайско-эфиопских отношений в ходе Огаденской войны 1977—1978 гг.

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено вмешательству великих держав, в первую очередь США и СССР, а также КНР, в дела стран Африканского Рога во время Огаденской войны (1977—1978 гг.). Наряду с изучением общепринятых представлений о соперничестве двух сверхдержав в районе Африканского Рога автор стремится подчеркнуть сложное взаимодействие реальной политики Китая в отношении Африканского Рога, прежде всего Сомали и Эфиопии, с его отношениями с СССР и США, описывая перспективы

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китайской политики в Африке и реакцию Пекина на Огаденскую войну. В исследовании используются как публицистические, так и делопроизводственные источники, мемуары политических деятелей, материалы СМИ. Утверждается, что Китай обратил внимание на п-ов Сомали из-за активной политики СССР в регионе. Автор приходит к заключению, что советское влияние в регионе Африканского Рога привело к тому, что Огаденская война вышла за его пределы и приобрела международный масштаб, а реакция Китая на Огаденскую войну была в первую очередь направлена на то, чтобы сократить сферу влияния Советского Союза в регионе.

Ключевые слова: холодная война, Африканский Рог, Огаденская война, реакция Китая, Хайле Мариам Менгисту

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Introduction

After the 1974 revolution Ethiopia found itself isolated and sought a new patron. This made the leaders of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (Derg) to establish contacts with the socialist camp. Beijing extended its technical aid and medical support to African countries, including Ethiopia (Halliday & Molyneux, 1981; Selassie, 1980; Xiudong, 2011). In mid-1976, a high-level delegation led by Mengistu Hailemariam, then deputy chairperson of the Derg, made a secret state visit to Beijing and signed several arms and trade deals with China (Mengistu, 2011, p. 350). However, after reform and opening up China did not make a big proposal to socialist regimes. China's initial reaction to the Derg regime eventually worsened its ties with Ethiopia, particularly during the Ogaden war.

China's reaction to the Ogaden war was justified to maintain a balance of power in the region. Initially, China's ability to intervene in the Ogaden War was limited, and Beijing decided to stay out of the war.¹ However, the Soviet Union's involvement in Ethiopia intensified China's reaction to the Ogaden war. It

is for this reason that the purpose of this article is to reconstruct the dynamics of China — Ethiopia relations during the Ogaden war, but also to examine the crisis in the Horn of Africa and its impact on Sino-Ethiopian relations. For this particular study, it is important to recall the vital results of Sino-Ethiopian relations in the middle of the Cold War era.

The author draws on a wide range of both primary and secondary sources and methods to investigate content research using a qualitative and explanatory approach. Primary data sources were collected from newspapers, letters, memos, speeches, and correspondence exchanges. The study also used multiple secondary data sources. The author uses a problem-chronological approach, which makes it possible in the first part to show the development of superpower rivalry in the Horn of Africa, in the second — to reveal the specifics of China's relations with the Derg regime in Ethiopia (1974—1976), and in the third — to examine Beijing's reaction to the events surrounding the Ogaden War (1977—1978).

Analytical Background

A number of key studies on the subject have sufficiently covered various aspects of the bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and China. For example, M. Venkataraman and A.G. Gamora (Venkataraman & Gamora, 2009), K.M. Daddi (2009), Wei Xiudong (2011), S. Adem (2012) and Wang Xiaoguang (2014) detail the main phases of China — Ethiopia

¹ See: Scalapino R. A. Sino-Soviet Competition in Africa // *Foreign Affairs*. 1964. Vol. 42, no. 4. P. 640—654. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20029719> (accessed: 26.10.2022); Stansfield T. The Naval Balance: Not Just a Numbers Game // *Foreign Affairs*. 1977. Vol. 55, no. 2. P. 339—354. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20039649> (accessed: 26.10.2022). See also: (Jones, 2011; Yordanov, 2012).

relations both during and after the Cold War. The history of Sino-Ethiopian relations during and after the Cold War is explored in Venkataraman and Gamora (2009), who emphasize that political and economic relations between China and Ethiopia have shown rapid growth since the beginning of the Cold War, and economic and technical cooperation between China and Ethiopia began during the imperial rule of Ethiopia, especially in the last years of Emperor Haile Selassie.

G. Tareke (2000) outlined the impact of the Ethiopian revolution in the region because it provided Somalis with a significant opportunity to assert their territorial claims to the Horn of Africa, that is, the annexed Ogaden in mid-1977. The Ethiopian Revolution, as C. Legum (1975) pointed out, provided fertile ground for the Derg leaders to change the direction of their foreign policy and in 1975 to seek external patronage patron. The internal struggle for power between the various factions in Ethiopia was so strong that the Derg could not remain in power with local forces alone. This is why Soviet support for the Derg regime was certainly a decisive factor in the Ogaden war, but Derg's decision to move eastward was based, in part, on Derg's awareness of the need to consolidate its power and its vulnerability to Somali aggression against Ethiopia.

For his part, Wei Xiudong (2011) provided a historical overview of Sino-Ethiopian relations from various perspectives, without paying due attention to the influence of external forces. He mostly focused on the period before and after the resumption of official ties, which dates from the beginning of the Cold War to 2011. As Daddi explained (2009, p. 29), the pro-Western policy of Haile Selassie was a major factor impeding Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with China. The serious ideological disharmony between the two countries before the early 1970s soon led to contradictions with each other not only on diplomatic aspects, but mostly related to proxy participation on opposite sides in the Korean and Congolese wars.

A similar study by Venkataraman and Gamora (2009, pp. 17—19) also examines

China's role in Ethiopia and its activity in Africa. The authors point to three motives for China's activity in Africa, including Ethiopia:

1) intense ideological struggles within China;

2) disagreements with a former ally, the Soviet Union, to the point of breaking off diplomatic ties in the 1960s, which also affected the loss of Africa as an important superpower ally;

3) distribution of the balance of power between the opposing US and the USSR, which did not allow China to play a more significant role. Under these conditions, Sino-Ethiopian relations began to develop in the 1970s. The presented argument seems novel, but it does not explain the intensity of political and economic relations between China and Ethiopia during the Cold War era. Focusing on the 1974 revolution, C. Legum (1975), M. Ottaway (1976), F. Halliday and M. Molyneux (Halliday & Molyneux, 1981), and R.A. Yordanov (2012) looked separately at each bone of contentions between superpowers, in the Horn of Africa, including China.

Thus, each of the aforementioned studies, either directly or indirectly focusing on Sino — Ethiopia relations, has essentially examined each country's decision-making process individually. In addition to these studies, there are other studies that focus on both international realities and domestic issues that have impacted the bilateral relationship between China and Ethiopia. For example, J.H. Spencer (1977, pp. 18—19) described the external forces that shaped Derg's foreign relations during the mid-Cold War period. These forces included superpowers, middle powers, and some other actors, such as Cuba and the People's Republic of South Yemen. Their alignment with Ethiopia during this period was motivated by self-interests related to maintaining the balance of power in the region.

According to P. Schwab (1978), despite the supposed détente in the Horn of Africa, ongoing Cold War relations between the superpowers were based on their ongoing rivalry for influence in the region. Although the author considered

superpower rivalry as the result of political changes among African countries, including Ethiopia and Somalia, his analysis focused largely on the debate over how great power rivalry affected the dynamics of Sino-Ethiopian relations in the late 1970s.

M. Ayoob (1980, p. 167) suggested that U.S. foreign policy in the region was not ideological, but primarily strategic and military in nature. The center of gravity of the superpower rivalry was the control of the Red Sea, and whatever its outcome, it was to have a major impact beyond the Horn of Africa and influence the course of Sino-Ethiopian relations at the beginning of the Cold War era. According to Yordanov (2012), the crisis in the Horn of Africa, especially between Somalia and Ethiopia, could be partially explained in terms of the geostrategic interests of the superpowers and China. It is the strategic location of Ethiopia that has become a bone of contention for such great powers.

Finally, Wang Xiaoguang (2014) focused on three important developments in Sino-Ethiopian relations that would subsequently lead to a renewed relationship between China and Ethiopia in the post-Cold War era. These developments include:

1) the restoration of Sino-Ethiopian relations after the weakening of Sino-Soviet relations in the early 1980s;

2) the growing intensity of high-level exchanges between China and Ethiopia;

3) Zhao Ziyang's trip to Africa and the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident.

These events confirmed China's growing interest in Africa, including Ethiopia. According to Wang Xiaoguang, it was after the end of the Cold War that a new level of cooperation between China and Ethiopia was achieved. All this reaffirms China's burgeoning interest in Africa including Ethiopia.

All of the above studies (with the exception of Legum's analysis, which is descriptive in nature) can be divided into two categories: those dealing with various aspects of the policies of the Provisional Military Administrative Council within the framework of relations between

Beijing and Moscow, and those examining the revised Ethiopian foreign policy towards the Soviet Union in the 1970s by Mengistu Hailemariam. Each study is undoubtedly useful and constructive. However, each is particularly vulnerable to criticism because of its narrow level of analysis.

I. Debeche (1987), for example, focuses his work on China's political views on the crisis in the Horn of Africa, which was shaped both by its overall orientation and decreasing obsession against the Soviet Union in the late 1970s. The author begins by criticizing what he defines as a trend among superpowers, including China, toward a systemic approach. The problem with such a synoptic review, he points out, is the following: "Each factor fails to capture the potential dynamics of the relationship between the levels of analysis... (and) which illustrates the tendency for competition to impose analytical barriers to research" (Debeche, 1987, p. 1026). Debeche developed a theoretical framework for overcoming these barriers. His work is one of the most comprehensive studies of China's role in Africa during the Cold War. His particular advantage over other previous studies stems primarily from the theoretical framework. However, Debeche's inability to indicate the comparative importance of systemic and subsystemic factors and to show how the impact of external forces changes as he moves from one level to the next limits the possibilities of his model. Given this, he can identify a systemic and individual level of analysis that shows a tendency to fluctuate and downplay the importance of the relationship between China and individual African countries.

Since Debeche's goal was to show how systemic and unit factors combine or interact to produce international relations, in this case China's response to the Ogaden war, and since this led him to use a linkage model for his analysis, one wonders whether there is not another model, theory, or approach that could achieve the same goal, perhaps in a somewhat better and less controversial way.

Superpowers in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa, strategically located in the lower part of the Red Sea, embedding itself in the Indian Ocean and being geographically advantageous for access to the Middle East, has been an important area of great political and economic sensitivity in a world, where superpowers competed for influence to such an extent that it even threatened the *détente* during the Cold War.² The situation was exacerbated by the territorial border conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden province, which escalated into a war between the two neighboring countries, claiming a common ideology of socialism, caused a change in the foreign policy of the superpowers toward the protagonist countries.

Before discussing the involvement of the superpowers in the Horn of Africa, it would be useful to briefly review the political developments involving the latter countries, on the one hand, and the role of the superpowers, including China, on the other. Such an analysis would shed light on China's foreign relations with the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia and Ethiopia. From 1974—1976, China tried to maintain friendly relations with both hostile states in the Horn of Africa. In October 1969, the Somali military regime under Mohammed Siad Barre became leftist and hostile to imperialist powers.³ The Barre regime's "progressive" stance culminated in the establishment of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Somalia (RSPS) in June 1976. This development was regarded by the Soviet Union as "a new important step in the development of the Somalia revolution and

evidence of the resolve of Somalia's working people, under the leadership of their militant vanguard, to struggle for national independence, freedom, and the building of a socialist society" (Halliday & Molyneux, 1981, p. 241).

At the same time, relations between the Soviet Union and Somalia became very close, strengthened after the two countries signed a 20-year friendship treaty in July 1974.⁴ As a result, 3,000 Soviet military advisers were sent to Somalia to provide technical support. More than 100 technicians and 700 Somalis were also trained by Soviet specialists in Somalia and the Soviet Union (Debeche, 1987, p. 1019). From 1971 to 1975, Somalia received from the Soviet Union 32 million USD in economic aid and 132 million USD in military aid.⁵ In 1975, there were about 1,000 Soviet and 50 Cuban advisers there.⁶ This alarmed Western countries, especially the United States, which was already losing influence in the Horn, at least since the military regimes in Somalia and Ethiopia came to power in the early 1970s.

At the same time, the Soviet Union's main goal in the Horn was to secure its strategic interests by strengthening its friendly relations with the anti-imperialist Siad Barre regime in Somalia, which through rapprochement with the Soviet Union sought to create a powerful army capable of defending its territorial claims in the Horn, particularly in the Ogaden, to realize the long-standing dream of "Greater Somalia" (Laitin, 1977, p. 75; Tareke, 2000, pp. 635—667; Cooper, 2015).

To this end, in May 1977, the Somali army crossed the Ethiopian border and annexed the Ogaden in Ethiopia. At that time, the Soviet Union tried to engage in strengthening its

² For strategic location and importance of the Horn of Africa during the Cold War, see: (Mesfin, 2004).

³ Mohamed Siad Barre took power after political turmoil in the country which resulted in the assassination of Abdirashid Shermake, the Acting President of Somalia, in October 15, 1969. For more information, see: James G. Somalia's Overthrown Dictator, Mohammed Siad Barre, Is Dead // The New York Times. January 3, 1995. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/03/obituaries/somalia-s-overthrown-dictator-mohammed-siad-barre-is-dead.html> (accessed: 26.10.2022).

⁴ For more information, see: (Lockyer, 2006). See also: Soviet Union is reinforcing its presence in Horn Africa // The Ethiopian Herald. April 4, 1974; Darnton J. Russians in Somalia: Foothold in Africa Suddenly Shaky // The New York Times. September 16, 1977. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/09/16/archives/russians-in-somalia-foothold-in-africa-suddenly-shaky.html> (accessed: 26.10.2022).

⁵ The Guardian. February 24, 1975. See also: (Metz, 1993).

⁶ Daily Nation (Kenya). January 30, 1976.

relations with Ethiopia, shortly after Mengistu Hailemariam became chairman of the Derg in February 1977. The Soviets viewed him as a “progressive” and insightful leader of the Ethiopian revolution (Westad, 2007, p. 275).

In the early years (1974—1976) Derg’s revolutionary line was heavily undermined by supporters of the moderate line. The foreign relations of the new military regime in Ethiopia initially differed little from those followed by the emperor. However, the Ethiopian revolution took place at a time when the Soviet-Somali friendship treaty, Sino-Somali relations, and increased Soviet arms deliveries to Somalia were strengthening. Ethiopia’s obsolete weapons were not up to the country’s precarious position. Deliveries of modern weapons from the United States, especially defensive weapons, were slow. Consequently, Derg had no clear political orientation, especially toward the United States (Halliday, 1977, p. 8; Negussay, 1977; Metaferia, 2009).

For its part until the advent of the Carter administration, the United States was not inclined to take a hostile stance toward the Derg until 1976 (Negussay, 1977; Korn, 1986, pp. 18—19; Mangasa, 1987). Until April 1976, the United States continued to sell arms and provide military assistance to Ethiopia. It should be noted that U.S. policy of selling arms to Ethiopia was not dictated by its strategic importance in the region. By the time Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown, the United States had already begun to lose interest in Ethiopia and left the country for various reasons.

Unlike its predecessor, the Carter administration put an end to various options and decided in April 1977 to suspend arms shipments to Ethiopia, including those already paid for to the tune of 100 million USD (according to Derg Interim Military Administrative Council officials), and signaled that it was ready to support Ethiopia’s rivals in the region, especially Sudan and Saudi Arabia.⁷ This change in U.S.

⁷ For a decline of US interest in Ethiopia, see: United States arms policies in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea areas, past, present, and future : report of a staff survey mission to Ethiopia, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, pursuant to

policy coincided with the rise to power of Lt. Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam as the undisputed leader of the Derg in February 1977. President Carter was well aware that the U.S. would face a greater challenge for Ethiopia’s revolutionary leadership than he had anticipated. This belief was also supported by Arab states such as Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which strongly opposed the U.S. policy of maintaining friendly relations with Ethiopia.

Mengistu’s Early Relations with China

Attempts by Ethiopia in obtaining Chinese assistance were unsuccessful. Both China and Ethiopia claimed that the two countries had friendly relations, with mutual respect and periodic exchanges of delegations. However, China’s assistance was mainly limited to economic projects such as road building and drilling wells.⁸ As a result, China’s influence on the Derg leadership was limited, despite the presence of large numbers of Maoists in Ethiopia, especially among students.

Ethiopia turned to the Soviet Union for arms, so far without success. The Soviet media praised the Ethiopian revolution.⁹ However, initially, the Soviet government did not support weapons deliveries to guard the revolution. Nevertheless, Derg continued to seek Moscow’s friendship and goodwill, hoping that the Kremlin would stop Somalia’s incursion into Ethiopian territory at a time of instability in Ethiopia. In March, Fidel Castro visited Ethiopia and Somalia in an attempt to create a Federation of the Horn of Africa, but Mohamed Siad Barre opposed the

H. Res. 313: authorizing the Committee on International Relations to conduct thorough studies and investigations of all matters coming within the jurisdiction of the Committee // U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington, 1977. P. 172. URL: <http://link.library.in.gov/portal/United-States-arms-policies-in-the-Persian-Gulf/yvJsKlx858g/> (accessed: 26.10.2022). See also: (Lyons, 1978, p. 10; Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 55—67, 90—130).

⁸ To support the agrarian reform in Ethiopia, China sent technicians on January 17, 1975. For details, see: (Yodfat, 1980, p. 33).

⁹ See: Soviet Writers Lauds Ethiopian Revolution // The Ethiopian Herald. July 9, 1976; Ethiopia in Soviet Press // The Ethiopian Herald. May 30, 1976.

proposal.¹⁰ Stubbornly asserting its rights to the Ogaden, the Somali National Army occupied Ethiopia's Ogaden province in July 1977.¹¹

When Soviet relations with Somalia began to deteriorate, China, which had maintained close ties with Somalia, tried to expand its position by replacing the Soviet Union (Waters, 1982, pp. 17—23). F. Castro's inability to find a win-win solution for settling the disputes at the Horn left the Soviet Union no choice but to take sides.¹² Accordingly, the Soviet Union chose to support the "just war" waged by Ethiopia to defend its internationally recognized territory.¹³ Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden was a clear violation of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as stated in the principles of the Accra Declaration. For Moscow, the opportunity to gain influence in Ethiopia seemed too good to be missed. Ethiopia, as a potential ally, had much to offer despite Somalia's naval forces. Apart from international problems and competition, Ethiopia was a much larger and more powerful country than Somalia.

¹⁰ For discussion of Aden meeting between Mohamed Siad Barre and Mengistu Hailemariam along with Fidel Castro and Salim Rubai Ali, see: (Westad, 2007, pp. 274—275). See also: Gleijeses P. Havana's Policy in Africa, 1959—76: New Evidence from Cuban Archives // Cold War International History Project Bulletin. 1996. No. 8/9. P. 5—18. URL: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/CWIHP_Bulletin_8-9.pdf (accessed: 26.10.2022).

¹¹ Third African Department, the Ministry Soviet Foreign affairs Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial Disputes // Wilson Center Digital Archive. February 2, 1977. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/third-african-department-soviet-foreign-ministry-information-report-somali-ethiopian> (accessed: 26.10.2022). See also: (Lockyer, 2006; Westad, 2007; Woodroffe, 2014).

¹² Transcript of a meeting between East German leader Erich Honecker and Cuban leader Fidel Castro, East Berlin (excerpts) regarding Castro's visit to Somalia and Ethiopia, criticizing Siad Barre and discussing the need to help the revolution in Ethiopia // Wilson Center Digital Archive. April 3, 1977. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/transcript-meeting-between-east-german-leader-erich-honecker-and-cuban-leader-fidel-castro> (accessed: 26.10.2022). See also: (Lockyer, 2006; Westad, 2007; Woodroffe, 2014).

¹³ Records of conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia A.P. Ratanov and Mengistu. February 9, 1977 // Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI). Fund 5. Reg. 73. Case 1636. P. 31—32, 33—38.

The Soviet Union's presence on Ethiopia's side also had the following additional reasons. First, Siad Barre's friendly offers to take a pro-Western stance and his rapprochement with radical Arab states opposed to the Soviet Union, such as Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Second, after Mengistu came to power, his regime began to develop increasingly anti-Western orientations and attitudes. Finally, Ethiopia's strategic position provides access to control of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, as well as the location of the OAU. However, it should be recalled that until November 1977, the Soviet Union had relatively good relations with Somalia, even as Moscow was drawing closer to Ethiopia. By the summer of 1977, Ethiopia received weapons from Czechoslovakia, an ally of the Soviet Union. It was reported that as early as December 1976, the Soviet Union and Ethiopia signed a secret arms transfer agreement (Lyons, 1978, p. 11; Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 55—68).

After Somalia annexed Ogaden in July 1977, the Soviet Union became a friend of Ethiopia. Soviet military support began to be delivered to Ethiopia in large quantities, and Soviet and Cuban experts arrived in Ethiopia in significant numbers. In November 1977, President Siad Barre expelled Soviet military and technical advisers from Somalia.¹⁴ At the same time, Ethiopia was drawing closer to the Soviet Union as Somali troops continued to occupy its territory. On November 15, 1977, the Soviet Union left Somalia, closing its military facilities in Berbera; Soviet and Cuban advisors were also ordered to leave the country (Yordanov, 2012, p. 243). With Soviet-Cuban support, Ethiopia was able to dislodge Somali troops from the Ogaden in March 1978. When the Ogaden war ended, Ethiopia received some 1.5 billion USD in Soviet military aid (Halliday & Molyneux, 1981, p. 247). The Soviet Union and Ethiopia

¹⁴ Third African Department, the Ministry Soviet Foreign affairs Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial Disputes // Wilson Center Digital Archive. February 2, 1977. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/third-african-department-soviet-foreign-ministry-information-report-somali-ethiopian> (accessed: 26.10.2022). See also: (Lockyer, 2006; Westad, 2007; Woodroffe, 2014).

also signed a 20-year friendship treaty and economic cooperation agreement in November 1978.¹⁵

China's Reaction to the Ogaden War

Following the Sino-Soviet disputes in the mid-Cold War, China's reaction to the Ogaden war raised the following pertinent questions: How did China react to events in the Horn of Africa? How did the Sino-Soviet competition make China entangled in the Ogaden war? Therefore, before analyzing China's reaction to Ogaden war, it is important to show the Sino-Soviet competition in the region.

In the early 1970s, China pursued the “three worlds” theory by putting itself as part of the Third World and forging unity against neo-colonialism, imperialism, and “revisionism.”¹⁶ China sought to establish a peaceful relationship with all the Third World countries under the patronage of the Five principles of peaceful coexistence.

China's foreign policy towards the Horn of Africa was generally guided by its foreign policy orientation in Africa, which was betrothed in fierce competition with the Soviet Union. Geostrategic interests seem to have often defined Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War, which included a desire to maintain basic military bases in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (Legum, 1975, p. 13; Ayoob, 1980, pp. 156—157; Waters, 1982, p. 20; Westad, 2007, pp. 273—279). In contrast, China had limited strategic interests in the region. Chinese interest seems to have been commensurate with Soviet actions in the region (Laitin, 1977, p. 127; Anshan, 2016).

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union and China had a fierce competition, particularly during the Ogaden war (1977—1978). The escalation of border conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia and the change of alliance with the Soviet Union

took place at a time when China was consumed by its anti-Soviet mania.¹⁷ From China's perspective, the Horn of Africa was another example (after Sudan and Egypt) in opposition to the hegemonic behavior of the USSR in Africa (Nurthen, 1980; Valenta, 1980). The Soviet-Cuban intervention in the Ogaden war was publicly condemned by China.¹⁸

Initially, China wanted to maintain friendly relations with both Ethiopia and Somalia. China believed that a peaceful solution to the crisis in the Horn could be sought, if Ethiopia and Somalia were free from interference and competition by superpowers and other actors.

In such a context, China's relations with Ethiopia and Somalia continued to be normal in the early years of the Derg (1974—1977), although they cooled somewhat toward Ethiopia after 1977. In April 1977, a delegation led by Tamrat Ferede, a member of the standing committee of the Derg, visited China on a week-long official visit and asked for military assistance.¹⁹ As the Table 1 shows, Ethiopia received 5 million USD in military aid from China in 1974—1978/1979.

Table 1
**Arms Transfer from China to African Countries,
1974—1978/1979, millions USD**

Country	Amount
Congo	10
Egypt	60
Ethiopia	5
Mali	5
Mozambique	5
Somalia	5
Sudan	5
Tanzania	30
Tunisia	10
Zaire	30
Zambia	30

Source: (Scherer, 1983).

¹⁷ Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World // Wilson Centre. December 5, 2016. URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/shadow-cold-war-the-sino-soviet-competition-for-the-third-world> (accessed: 26.10.2022).

¹⁸ See: New York Time. February 20, 1978; Washington Post. February 17, 1978.

¹⁹ Ethiopian Government Delegation Is Arrived // The Peking Review. April 15, 1977. No. 16.

¹⁵ The friendship treaty that signed with Ethiopia called for continued cooperation in the military field and provided for close consultation and coordination of Soviet and Ethiopian policies in the case of a threat to or breach of international peace. For details, see: Pravda. November 21, 1978. (In Russian).

¹⁶ The Peking Review. December 2, 1978.

In the economic sphere, a 7,000-seat sports hall was under construction in Ethiopia (Copper, 1979, pp. 34—35). In August 1978, the construction of a Chinese hydroelectric power plant was completed and handed over to the Ethiopian government. However, Ethiopia became closer to the Soviet Union, while Somalia became more hostile to the Soviet Union. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for China to maintain friendly relations with both Somalia and Ethiopia. Provoked by the Soviet sphere of influence in Ethiopia, China renewed its support for the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). These actions by China were due to the failure of the Soviet Union and its allies to pressure the Derg regime to find a peaceful solution to the ELF insurgents.

Not surprisingly, Mengistu felt provoked and condemned against China as “one of the thirteen reactionary countries that had directly or indirectly launched a concentrated assault against us (Ethiopia. — *Author’s note*).”²⁰ On the other hand, on May 19, 1979, Somali Foreign Minister, Omar Arteh Ghalib stated “Somalia had the best relations with China, which offer us both military and economic aid” (Fraser, 1979, p. 29877).

In retaliation, in March 1979, two correspondents of the Xinhua news agency were accused of spreading anti-Ethiopian revolutionary propaganda and ordered to leave the country. In this environment, Sino-Somali relations developed along friendly lines. Somalia’s decision to expel Soviet advisers and reduce the number of Soviet diplomats in Mogadishu was perceived by China as a bold move that had “of great importance in the struggle against the hegemonic powers... proves once again that Soviet social-imperialism is a paper tiger with a fierce face but a weak heart. So long as they dare to struggle, the small and weak countries certainly can defeat Soviet aggression, interference, control, and bullying, with extensive sympathy and support from the

²⁰ See: China: The New Supplier of Bullets for Somalia // Ethiopian Herald. September 12, 1978; The Beijing Leadership: It’s Anti-Marxist-Leninist Stance // The Ethiopian Herald. November 2, 1978.

people at home and abroad, and make positive contributions to the united struggle of the world’s people against hegemonism... Justice is on the side of Somalia” (Debeche, 1987, p. 1028).

On April 16, 1978, President Siad Barre paid a state visit to China where he was assured of unconditional support for Somalia’s struggle against imperialism and hegemonism.²¹ In response to a visit by Somali Vice-President Ismail Ali in June 1977, Vice-Premier Chen Muhua, alternate Politburo member and responsible for China’s foreign aid program, visited Somalia in August 1978.²² In her talks with Somalia leaders, Chen Muhua reaffirmed China’s stance: “On the side of their joint struggle to safeguard the national independence and state sovereignty of Somalia” (Copper, 1979, p. 31).

During her visit, Chen Muhua attended the opening ceremony of the 970-kilometer Beletwein — Burao road built under the Chinese aid project.²³ This highway project is becoming important for Somalia to transport agricultural products from the south to the pastoral areas in the north.²⁴ Initially, the project was offered to a Western company, but it was rejected because the cost of transporting water to the construction sites was too high. However, Chinese specialists solved this problem by drilling wells, creating reservoirs and canals. All this was offered to Somalia for further agricultural use (Fraser, 1979, p. 29392).

In addition, in November 1978, during his African tour, Chinese Vice-Premier Keng Piao visited Somalia, where Chinese agricultural aid projects were underway but had not been completed by the Soviet Union (Copper, 1979, p. 31). In 1980, China also offered Somalia some

²¹ Somali President Begins Talks with High Officials in Peking // The New York Times. April 16, 1978. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/16/archives/somali-president-begins-talks-with-high-officials-in-pekings.html> (accessed: 26.10.2022).

²² The Peking Review. August 25, 1978. No. 34. P. 4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Desert Highway in Somalia // The Peking Review. September 15, 1978. No. 37. P. 29.

300,000 tons of rice and other food for the immediate needs of refugees in Somalia (Copper, 1979, p. 41).

In the military sphere, between 1974 and 1978/9, Chinese arms deliveries to Somalia were estimated at 5 million USD (see Table 1). It was reported that China had promised to supply the Siad Barre regime with 20 MIG-19 aircraft in 1981 (Kanet & Ipatov, 1980). In July 1981, a delegation of the Somalia Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) headed by Ahmed Suleiman Abdullah, a member of the party's political bureau and the president's security adviser, visited Beijing. In a joint statement marked by Li Xiannian, Vice-Chairman of China's Communist Party, and Ahmed noted that "The strategic objective of the Soviet Union is global supremacy and the turbulent situation in the Horn of Africa is the result of Soviet aggression and interference" (Debeche, 1987, p. 1030). In 1981, the construction of the Balewen rice farm near Jowhar in Somalia was also completed with Chinese aid (Scherer, 1983, p. 199). Four years later, in March 1982, the Fanol Dam project was also completed. It could generate hydroelectric power and irrigate 7,500 acres of farmland. It was the major water project that China had built in the Juba River.

Influenced by both domestic and international factors, the early years of cordiality between China and Ethiopia did not last long. This relationship suffered in the following years, between 1977 and 1982 when Ethiopia turned to the Soviet Union for military support. As noted earlier, China's relations with Africa, including Ethiopia during the Cold War, should be seen in the context of its relations with superpowers, especially with the Soviet Union. Therefore, China's foreign policy towards Africa in general and the Horn, in particular, underwent a radical change, because China preferred a power race, mainly against the Soviet Union in the Horn, where Ethiopia and Somalia are located (Fraser, 1978, p. 29183). Added to this was China's position on the Ogaden war, which further challenged the diplomatic relationship between China and Ethiopia. To Ethiopia's surprise, China provided strong support to the Somali

government in the political, economic, and military spheres during the Somali-Ethiopian border conflicts. Thus, Sino-Ethiopian relations remained strained until the obsession with the Soviet Union was restored in the early 1980s.

Discussion

The Ogaden war proved to be a vital Cold War episode for the deepening competition between superpowers and China. In the U.S., the Ogaden war was largely responsible for the demise of détente politics, especially after Jimmy Carter was elected president in 1976. For Reagan, détente perpetuated the Cold War, rather than hastening its end (Gaddis, 2005, p. 17). The Reagan doctrine was a return to the anti-communism that had defined early U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Nevertheless, Reagan's desire to fight the Soviets led to alliances with notoriously expansionist and military regimes in the Third World, notably Said Barre.

China, on the other hand, was differently affected by the Ogaden War. For China, the crisis in the Horn of Africa showed that despite the new Sino-American rapprochement, China would not sacrifice its common foreign policy goals in the Third World for the sake of the United States. If the U.S. wanted to form an alliance with authoritarian Arab states like Saudi Arabia, Sudan, or Lebanon, it could do so, but it would get no support from China in the process. Moreover, China proved that it could manipulate US fears of the Soviet Union to its geopolitical interests, and encourage the US to pursue countervailing foreign policy initiatives against the Soviet Union that would harm Chinese interests in Third World countries where China pursued its political guidelines.

The Horn of Africa crisis also represented the different Cold War worldviews held by China and the United States. China did not leave Ethiopia in the Soviet sphere of influence, but as a region with an important geostrategic location, a potential ally, and a place where Soviet interests in the region could be offset by appropriate military aid to Somalia. On the other

hand, the U.S. viewed the Derg leaders as mere Soviet clients to be forcibly overthrown.

However, China's willingness to provide military supplies to Somalia was a double-edged sword. For China, the Ogaden war represented the height of the proxy war against the Soviet Union during the Cold War, following its victory over the United States in Angola. The Ogaden War also encouraged a more active China's foreign policy in the Third World for years to come. As Deng Xiaoping remarked, "Having suffered no major international complications because it interfered in the Horn, the Soviets had no scruples about escalating their activities in other countries, first Angola, then the Horn, several African and Middle East countries, and, to crown it all Afghanistan" (Sutter, 1978).

Here A. Dobrynin shed light on an interesting trend: after the Soviets' victory in the Ogaden, they became all too willing to intervene in regional conflicts and conduct proxies against the US and China in the Third World (Dobrynin, 1995). However, eventually, the Soviet generous policies in the Third World would contribute to the downfall of the Soviet Union. The "dust settled in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa" when the Soviets became embroiled in the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977. During this war, the Soviet Union and its allies offered Ethiopia "more than 1.5 billion USD in military aid" and also provided technical support (sending thousands of military advisors and fighters) to Ethiopia to defeat Somalia (Westad, 2007, p. 276).

For the Horn, "the interventions of superpowers, including China in the Ogaden War would cause apocalyptic consequences" (Westad, 2007, p. 286). The war fundamentally led to the disintegration of the Barry regime, and the Horn remains notoriously unstable to this day, especially in Somalia. At least temporarily, China lost Ethiopia to the Soviet Union. Although the Soviets and their allies supported the winning side, they had to pay dearly for their assertive foreign policy in the Third World. In the Horn of Africa, the Soviet armed forces were bleeding, not without the support of China and

the United States. As soon as the Soviets began to gain the upper hand in Angola and the Horn of Africa, the U.S. and China also increased their penetration into the Third World, and the Soviet system collapsed.

The very course of the Ogaden war and its aftermath made it one of the most important themes in Cold War history. The Horn crisis was a litmus test for Sino-American rapprochement and led to one of the biggest shifts in the history of U.S. foreign policy in the Third World. For the demise of détente, a belligerent foreign policy of the US aiding anyone, despite their human rights record, who stood against the Soviets in the Third World. The Ogaden War showed China's rise as a contender for international power and a moderate aid donor to Somalia to counterweigh the Soviet Union in the region. China also showed that, despite rapprochement with the US, it would still maintain relations with the developed countries that were thought to support its reforms. Moreover, the rise of the Soviet's confidence after its victory in the Ogaden war was short-lived, and its union collapsed after the new confidence gained in the Horn of Africa.

Conclusion

Since the end of World War II, the Horn of Africa has been one of the strategic locations that attracted superpowers and other actors. After the Sino-Soviet rivalry in the middle of the Cold War period, the Soviet Union's presence in the Horn of Africa intensified in order to expand its sphere of influence in the region.

After the Ethiopian revolution, the Derg leaders pursued the same foreign policy as the imperial regime. Ethiopia's initial non-aligned stance allowed the Derg leaders to seek military assistance from any source (like Washington, Moscow or Beijing). However, both Washington and Beijing were hesitant to respond to the Derg regime's requests for military assistance. Due to internal and external factors, the Derg leaders intended to "shop" military supply from every possible source. Eventually, Ethiopia began to

think about reorienting its foreign policy. The key reason for this was the reduction of U.S. military aid to Ethiopia. This policy shift was made to gain immediate military assistance to combat the external threat coming from Somalia. During the Ethiopian revolution, military control of the civilian government led to an increased likelihood that the Derg regime would shift to a socialist bloc. After Ethiopia received very little military supplies from the United States, Derg leaders began looking for an alternative ally for urgent military assistance to combat external threats.

As in Angola, the Soviet Union was engaged in the arms race with the United States in the Horn of Africa. Before the Sino-US détente, the U.S. had used the Horn as a means of mitigating contradictions with the Soviets by trying to use the China card. In between these challenges, Sino-American rapprochement contributed to the U.S. decision to form an alliance with China against the Soviet Union. Zb. Brzezinski calculated that making an alliance with China against the Soviets would increase U.S. influence over the Soviet Union in the

Horn. The U.S. is trying to use the Chinese card to convince the Soviets of acceptable behavior in the Third World. From the beginning of the war for the Ogaden, the U.S. was extremely restricted in its actions because of the ideological orientation of the military regime in Ethiopia. The Soviet Union's reliance on Somalia and Ethiopia to protect its interests was a fairly straightforward policy that justified its presence in the Horn of Africa.

As a result, after the U.S. lost the war in Vietnam, the crisis in the Horn of Africa became another superpower battlefield already in the region, including China. As G. Modelski argues: "Every internal war creates a demand for foreign intervention" (Modelski, 1964, p. 20). The location of the Horn in a strategically important location in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean has attracted other powers in the region. This competition made the Ogaden War more complex and brought an international dimension. The Soviet Union and its allies fought against Somalia using Ethiopia, while the United States and China fought against Ethiopia using Somalia to assert their presence in the region.

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