

**THE HORN OF AFRICA —
OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

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South African awareness of issues in the Horn of Africa is not as a rule very acute, but during 1984 the local and international media devoted considerable attention to the political, economic and social problems of the area. The acute nature of the Horn's refugee problem led to a growing interest in the area in an attempt to identify the causes and suggest solutions to the current situation. Secondly, and quite separately, the visit of Foreign Minister RF Botha to Mogadishu, Somalia, in December 1984 gave rise to a flood of speculations but also demonstrated how little was generally known about this East African state and the region surrounding it. This Paper attempts to explain the historical, political and economic framework within which the states operate in the Horn of Africa, to identify Superpower involvement there and to shed some light on the region's refugee and other problems. It also briefly narrates the sequence of events surrounding the South African Foreign Minister's visit to Mogadishu and makes some tentative suggestions as to the manner in which South Africa might become fruitfully involved in Somalia.

1. Geography and History

Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and less directly, the Sudan and Kenya, lie within the Horn of Africa. This Paper focuses on the three former states and refers to the Sudan and Kenya only when they are relevant to issues in the more narrowly-defined region. In this connection it is suggested that the coup which deposed President Numeiry on 6 April 1985 is unlikely materially to affect the balance of power or intra-regional relations. The strategic importance of the Horn of Africa, which dominates the East-West shipping waters in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf-Red Sea region, has been acknowledged for over a hundred years and this has led to an international interest in the region out of all proportion to its intrinsic value. The countries share many common problems such as a high proportion of arid and uncultivable land, sparse population, food, raw material and mineral shortages, lack of water, poor infrastructure and communications and complex multi-ethnic societies which have caused endless and apparently irreconcilable border conflicts. Yet in the late 19th Century they were the focus of the European powers' colonial ambitions and from this history stems many of their contemporary difficulties.

1.1 Ethiopia

This is by far the largest state in the region. Its area is 1 223 600 square kilometres and its population in 1984 stood at 32 775 000 (the third largest in Africa) with a density of 26,8 per square kilometre. The Ethiopian Highlands are temperate and agriculturally viable, but the state extends on its southern and eastern frontiers to the semi-arid Red Sea coast and Somali border.

In the mid 19th Century, the dominant Coptic Christian Amharic-speakers of the interior extended their control during the reign of Emperor Menelik over the Moslems of the coast and formed a multi-ethnic empire. Attracting the interest of Italy (of whose colonial appetite Bismarck is supposed to have remarked - "Such a big appetite and such small teeth") the Ethiopians defeated an Italian army at Adowa in 1896 but were ultimately absorbed into Mussolini's Italian Empire in 1935. South Africans played a major role in liberating Ethiopia in 1941 when Emperor Haile Selassie returned to rule the country. Some Italian cultural and economic influence has however survived. Haile Selassie resumed his autocratic power and ruled until 1974 adopting moderately pro-Western policies combined with a modernisation

programme. Haile Selassie perceived himself as an African leader and was a prime mover in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (1963) which had, and still has, its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

In September 1974 Haile Selassie, whose hold over his country and ability to deal with its problems had declined with age, was deposed in a military coup, the leaders of which declared in December of that year that Ethiopia was to become a socialist state. Three years of anarchy followed as one military leader replaced another in a series of violent coups, but in 1977 Mengistu Haile Mariam grasped power, killing some 20 000 people in the process, and has maintained it ever since as Chairman of Ethiopia's Marxist Council of Ministers or Dergue.

1.2 Somalia

Whereas Ethiopia's coastline is a short one, Somalia's stretches for over 1 000 miles along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean and includes the "Horn" itself. With an area of 637 657 square kilometres but a population of only 5 116 000 (1982) density is 8 to the square kilometre. The people are virtually all Sunni Moslems and have close cultural, religious and historic links with the Arabs from whom they are separated at one point only by the few miles of the Red Sea Straits of Bab al Mandeb. Arabic is the lingua franca in Somaliland although a variety of Cushite African languages are also spoken. The climate is dry with less than 430 mm of rain falling on average, and 60% of the population is nomadic.

Somalia's modern history starts in 1960 when former British and Italian Somaliland were united as an independent republic and it has certain parallels with Ethiopia since in 1969 a military coup ousted President Abdi Reshid Ali Shermake and replaced him with Siad Barre who established the Somali Democratic Republic. Barre's initial political leanings were strongly towards the Soviet Union and the creation of a Marxist state. However, in 1977 in response to developments in Ethiopia and the border dispute between them, Barre performed a volte face, expelled his Soviet advisers, and made overtures to the United States. Since then, Barre has remained outwardly pro-Western although during 1984 there have been signs that he wishes to "normalise" relations with the USSR.

1.3 Djibouti

The French government of Napoleon III recognised the strategic significance of Djibouti as early as 1859 while they were constructing the Suez Canal and annexed the territory which they named French Somaliland. After World War II the region was declared a French overseas territory and in 1967 was rechristened the Territory of the Afars and Issas after the two major and mutually-hostile population groups. In 1977 independence was granted to what has henceforth been known as Djibouti, whose President is Hassan Gouled.

The republic of Djibouti is surrounded by Ethiopia and Somalia and is only 21 783 km² in extent with a population of 220 000, nearly all of whom live in the immediate vicinity of the city of Djibouti. The scenery has been described as "lava-covered desert" and the low rainfall ensures that agricultural resources are extremely limited.

2. Culture and Society in the Horn of Africa

This region of Africa has been in contact with the Arab world and, as far as the Ethiopians are concerned, with the Christian tradition, for far longer than is the case for the peoples of Africa further south or west.

2.1 Ethiopia was converted to Christianity when its ancestor state, Axum, was proselytised by Coptic Christian missionaries from Egypt in the 4th Century AD, some 200 years before St Augustine landed on the shores of Kent. The Christian tradition in Ethiopia is strong even if it has developed in isolation and Amharic has been a written language (with a script all of its own) for more than a thousand years. As Ethiopia expanded during the 19th Century its borders came to include not only the various Amharic and related language tribes of the interior but also the Eritrean, Tigrean and Somali Moslems of the southern and eastern regions so that today 45% of Ethiopia's people profess the Moslem religion and only 40% are Christians. Modern Ethiopia includes the former Italian colony of Eritrea and it is there that Addis Ababa faces its chief challenge since the Eritreans are fighting to free themselves from Ethiopia. Health services in Ethiopia are said to be entirely inadequate and although free education has reduced the illiteracy rate to 46% in 1983, only 12% of children between the ages of 13 and 18 were attending secondary schools in that year.

2.2 Somalia's sparse population (there are 7 times more goats, camels and cows than people), its historic links with the Arab peninsula, its Sunni Moslem religion and its largely nomadic population is culturally more akin to Arabia than to Africa. Islamic law is today firmly enforced and in 1984 Barre incurred considerable unpopularity as a result of his ban not only on alcohol but also on the chewing of a mildly narcotic leaf imported from Kenya.

Somalia is a homogeneous country but its claim to sovereignty over Somalis living in Ethiopia, northern Kenya and Djibouti is a major source of intra-regional tension. The country's extreme poverty has not been conducive to educational and social services development although it is estimated that only 25% of the population was illiterate in 1970.

2.3 Djibouti's society is bedevilled by rivalry between the Afars (roughly 40% of the population), who are related to the Ethiopians and the Issas (50%) who are akin to the Somalis. Both groups are predominantly Moslem. The balance of the population consists of around 8 000 Arabs and 10 000 Europeans, one half of whom are French. Official languages are Arabic and French and Djibouti's prosperity as a port and railway terminus has led to a comparatively high level of education amongst its population.

3. Economies and Economic Potential

With the possible exception of Djibouti (see below), the area's economy is underdeveloped. In both Ethiopia and Somalia attempts have been made in the last ten to fifteen years to modernise and develop, chiefly through the application of socialist principles such as nationalisation and, in Ethiopia, the creation of state farms. The economies of both countries are severely undercapitalised and possessed of infrastructures which are poor

and/or disrupted by guerrilla activity. Refugee flows from one country to another are further sources of economic stress.

3.1 Ethiopia

The economy is primarily pastoral and agricultural and this sector contributed 51% of the country's total GDP in 1980/81 together with 90% of its total export earnings. After 1974 the Marxist government embarked on a massive programme of land redistribution from the former semi-feudal proprietors to landless peasants who are encouraged to form producer co-operatives. However, it has been estimated that 45% of all agricultural activity is at subsistence level and the 300 000 hectares of state farms often run at a loss. There is considerable potential for improved agricultural production provided that there are much-needed injections of capital, mechanisation and skills.

The country's main export crop (66% of total) is coffee, which is grown in the well-watered central highlands and is thus less subject to drought than grain crops such as maize and other food staples. The serious drought of the early 1970s crippled Ethiopia's agriculture to such an extent that it was unable to cope effectively with the further dry years which occurred in 1982-84. A 1982 UN study predicted an increased gap between food production and population increase and this has been aggravated by refugee problems. State capital is directed into state farms which usually run at a loss and communications are poor.

Ethiopia has one of the world's poorest records for economic development. Among the reasons for this are climatic vagaries, massive skills shortage allied to low educational levels, civil strife and guerrilla activities. Furthermore, heavy defence spending (some 27% of the total budget in 1982/83) has contributed to a constant budget deficit and to the government's inability to channel money in other directions. There is a universal conscription system which has recently been extended to women. In 1981 the GNP was only \$140 per person, which is one of the lowest in the world and the second lowest in Africa. Industrial activity at present contributes only 16% of GDP and is mainly concerned with food processing and textiles. Furthermore, half of Ethiopia's industrial establishment is situated in Eritrea, a region with strongly secessionist tendencies.

The country is fortunate in its reserves of gold, platinum, and copper and may possibly have petroleum resources. The Soviet Union is at present assisting in exploration for these. Plentiful water supplies in the highlands have lent themselves to the development of hydroelectric schemes and there is the potential for much higher electricity production than at present. Communications are being developed in the form of a rapid highway link between Addis Ababa and Nairobi but Ethiopia's main land links, by rail to Djibouti and by road to the Ethiopian ports of Assab and Massawa, have been disrupted by guerrilla activities.

3.2 Somalia

Somalia is one of the world's ten poorest nations (UN estimate), although there have been signs since 1980 that a slight improvement is under way. Inflation of the Somali Shilling has been reduced from 45% per annum to 20% and although wages are low, Mogadishu, the capital, shows signs of a modest prosperity. A TV station was started in 1983 and video shops have

proliferated. Per capita income in 1983 was estimated at R310 per head plus a further R110 of free foreign aid.

The economy is largely based on nomadic pastoral activity and settled agriculture (only 20% of total) is constantly threatened by drought. When this occurs, as for instance when the 1983 harvest failed, hundreds of thousands of tons of food aid have to be poured in from the United States, Western Europe, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, World Bank and UN agencies. As with Ethiopia, Somali agriculture has lagged far behind population growth (aggravated by the influx of refugees) and the GNP has been declining by an average of 0,2% per annum since 1960. The chief export (80%) of Somalia is livestock still on the hoof to Saudi Arabia but this has been severely affected by drought. In the better watered south, bananas are grown and constitute the second largest source of foreign exchange. Somalia has a world monopoly in the production of frankincense (an aromatic gum resin).

The Somali government's present policy is inclined against nationalisation, other than of sugar production, and it intends to extend and modernise the economic infrastructure. Planning is based on 5-Year Development programmes which so far have consistently failed to meet their objectives. There are plans to build a huge dam at Bandera on the Juba river which would irrigate 220 000 hectares of land but the required capital for this (\$630 million) has not been forthcoming. The country suffers from a lack of skills and initiative which has led, for instance, to the exploitation of only 1 million hectares of the potentially fertile 8 million hectares lying between the Juba river and the Kenyan border. One explanation for this is the so-called "Gulf Factor" which means that upward of 100 000 Somalis have been attracted as migrant workers to the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf and Arabian peninsula. Their high salaries are a source of foreign exchange for Somalia, but their skills can ill be spared.

Industry is small and undercapitalised. What capital there is comes mainly from the government which encourages small scale industries and foreign investment. This investment is, however, not always properly directed. Take, for instance, an Italian-built factory which produces 45 000 tons of urea fertilizer per annum in a country which cannot use more than one third of that figure and at a price so high that it is unexportable. One senior Western aid official has dubbed this factory "a monument to the disgrace of foreign aid" (Star, 28 May, 1984).

Somalia has undeveloped mineral resources including potentially valuable deposits of petroleum, uranium, zinc, copper, manganese, tin and salt: Communications are very poor, apart from a Chinese-built road between Belet Uen and Burao, although there is, as South Africans are now aware, an international airport at Mogadishu and 8 other airfields. There are no railways.

Somalia's external debts stood at \$836 million in 1982 and it also suffers from a large balance of payments deficit. As one recent writer has put it: "The requirements of steady internal economic development versus external militant pan-Somalism, however, have usually proved contradictory". Somalia, like her neighbour, Ethiopia, overspends heavily on defence - some 25% of the total budget.

3.3 Djibouti

The economic potential of this small state lies in its being a major port, airport and railway terminus. In 1981 the port of Djibouti was declared a free zone. This has to some extent compensated for the losses incurred by Djibouti when the railway to Addis Ababa was closed by guerrilla activity. Since half of Ethiopia's foreign trade was formerly routed through Djibouti, the effects of the closure were considerable. In fact, Djibouti's economy is particularly vulnerable to the effects of regional conflicts, as, for instance, when the Suez Canal was closed between 1967 and 1975.

Its future economic prosperity could well lie in its role as a major entrepôt for trade between East Africa and the Arab states. In fact, countries as far afield as Uganda and Zaïre airfreight their products to Djibouti for export.

Djibouti's strategic location ensures easy access to foreign aid, especially from the French, the USA and some Arab states and consequently its balance of payments position is usually positive despite heavy defence expenditure. The government has recently introduced a 3-year development plan (1982-84) which is intended to co-ordinate the development schemes funded by foreign aid, and in 1980 Djibouti became a member of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation.

Farming activities are necessarily limited by the climate and terrain to a few scattered nomadic herders so most food has to be imported along with virtually all manufactured goods. Imports come mainly from Ethiopia, France, Japan and the United Kingdom.

4. Domestic Political Systems

The internal politics of all three states in the region share common characteristics in that each state bans all political opposition to the party which holds power and yet each is faced by intense and often overtly violent opposition from secessionist groups and/or from parties of different political persuasions.

4.1 Ethiopia

The government of Mengistu Haile Mariam professes Marxist beliefs and resolutely quells all opposition to its rule, whether from other Marxist groups, non-Marxists or secessionist Tigreans, Eritreans and Somalis. Ethiopia's politics have been described by the New York Times as "closer to Macbeth than Marx" and undoubtedly Mengistu and those who preceded him bear some resemblance to the warlords who ruled Ethiopia for centuries. When Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974, Ethiopia was ruled by a Provisional Military Administrative Council, or Dergue, of which Mengistu became Chairman in 1977 when he ousted rival claimants to power. In 1979 the Committee for the Organisation of the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE) was established. It functioned as a party, all other political organisations being then banned and parliament has not met since 1974. This action led to the creation of no less than eight "Liberation Fronts" in Ethiopia. Currently, COPWE is being replaced by a more orthodox party and party structure - the Ethiopian Workers' Party - probably in an attempt to legitimise Mengistu's control. He is only about 45 years old

and appears to be firmly in power despite the many economic, social and military problems of his country. Local government in Ethiopia is theoretically the responsibility of Kebelles or urban dwellers' associations in the cities, and of peasant associations in rural areas.

4.2 Somalia

President Mohamed Siad Barre has steered his country since 1969 on a course that has now veered radically from the extreme left-wing and pro-Soviet stance adopted until 1977. Despite the ostensibly United States orientation of Somalia since 1977 the country continues to bear many outward signs of a Soviet-style state. The KGB-trained secret police are omnipresent, and government is conducted through the Politburo of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party, the only legal party. Barre is Secretary-General of the Party, and has been elected for a succession of 5-year terms of office. Power in Somalia tends to reside in the Marehan clan of which Barre himself is a member, at the expense of the northern clans where opposition to Barre is chiefly based. This Ethiopian-backed opposition has many facets but is loosely linked in the Somali Democratic Salvation Front which is anti-American as well as anti-Barre.

4.3 Djibouti

Like its neighbours, Djibouti is a one-party state, in this case the Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès (RPP), President Hassan Gouled was elected by direct universal franchise with an 85% majority in 1981. He therefore enjoys support from both Afars and Issas and may hope to hold the country together on the basis of his personal authority. Laws are made by a 65-member Chamber of Deputies elected for a 5-year term from which a Council of Ministers headed by a Prime Minister assists the President in his executive functions.

5. Regional Interaction and Great Power Involvement

The entire Horn of Africa abounds in conflict as a result of its multi-farious ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and political character combined with an arid climate and underdeveloped economy. It is one of the regions of the world where the principle of territorial integrity conflicts most intensely with the notion of national self-determination. Great Power involvement, dating from the mid-19th Century, has tended to complicate and extend purely local conflicts. It is largely as a result of this factor that the refugee problem has arisen far beyond what would have occurred as a result of climate and dysfunction.

Colonial boundaries which either cut across and divide ethnic groups or which include mutually hostile groups within a state are a problem here, as in other parts of Africa. The Organisation of African Unity has adopted the principle that these boundaries should not be changed, thereby preventing endless claims for frontier adjustment but not obviating civil and inter-state conflict.

The two main and apparently intractable areas of conflict are over Eritrea and between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden. In fact, one sixth of Ethiopia is said to be in a state of actual or threatened insurrection.

5.1.1 Eritrea

The war between the Addis Ababa government and Eritrean secessionists is now entering its 25th year. This region, which lies along the Red Sea coastline of Ethiopia northwards from the port of Assab, is better developed and contains more easily exploitable minerals than the rest of Ethiopia. The Eritrean Liberation Front has been aided by various Arab states, the Sudan and more recently by Libya. It is predominantly Moslem although its uncertain ally, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Forces, representing the neighbouring Tigreans, is on the whole Christian. Ethiopia has the OAU's moral support in its efforts to prevent Eritrean and Tigrean secession because Tigre has been part of Ethiopia since the third quarter of the nineteenth century and Eritrea (a former Italian colony) was federated with Ethiopia by the UN in 1952. Eritrean opposition to Addis Ababa started in 1962 when its federal status was relegated to that of a province.

Eritrean guerrillas operate chiefly from bases in the Sudan - a bedevilling factor in Sudanese-Ethiopian relations. The vital importance of the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa to an otherwise landlocked Ethiopia resulted in a combined but unsuccessful Cuban, Soviet and Ethiopian effort in the late 1970s to defeat the ELF. Again in 1982, Operation "Red Star" failed to bring Eritrea into line as did a promise made in 1983 that Ethiopia's forthcoming constitution would contain safeguards for its minorities. In 1984 the Eritrean Liberation Front continued to flourish in the mountainous areas on the Sudanese borders and Eritrean refugees (from famine and drought as much as from war) have been flooding into the Sudan. Recent reports have suggested that the Ethiopian government is forcibly removing large numbers of Eritreans and Tigreans and resettling them in the underpopulated western provinces in an attempt to weaken local resistance to the central government. Another strategy is the well-documented misuse of famine relief aid to put pressure on the Eritreans and in January 1985 an Australian grain ship bound for Eritrean and Tigrean refugees was hijacked by the Ethiopian government and diverted to its own use.

5.1.2 The Ogaden and Somalia

Somalia has for long claimed that all ethnic Somalis within the region should be incorporated in a "Greater Somaliland". This claim complicates relations with Kenya, in whose north-eastern regions live many Somalis, and it has caused a state of chronic conflict with Ethiopia because of the Somalis who live in its south-eastern region, known as the Ogaden. The problem originates in a grant made by the British who, claim the Somalis, had no right to do so, of the region to Ethiopia in 1897. Barre has promised "to fight in the Ogaden until that region is liberated from Abyssinian [ie Ethiopian] control". In 1977 open war occurred between Ethiopia, aided by the USSR and Cuba, and Somalia, which did not get the assistance it had hoped for from the West. The result was that the Somali army retreated from the Ogaden, taking with it some one million Somali refugees, most of whom (estimates of numbers vary) are still in Somalia today and keep the Ogaden issue alive rather as PLO camps in neighbouring Arab states secure continued credibility for the Palestine issue.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia has been nothing loath to assist and use Somali opposition groups, such as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Somalia which operates from across the Ethiopian frontier and has not been eliminated despite large US credits to Somalia since 1980. The explosive

situation may, remarks a recent article on the area, escalate to full-scale war at any moment.

5.2 The Refugee Problem

War and climatic disasters have between them transformed many millions of people in the Horn of Africa from precarious subsistence farmers into the homeless and starving people whose plight has attracted worldwide attention. Estimated figures vary, but there cannot be less than 8 million who fall into this tragic category.

Both Ethiopia and Somalia have exploited this problem to their own advantage. Somalia claims to be harbouring between 1,2 and 2 million refugees although Western relief workers believe the figure is not much above 300 000. Surplus aid in food or equipment is used by the Somali government for its own purposes, mainly military.

Ethiopia also capitalises on its misfortunes in order to obtain World Bank Aid (between \$400 and 500 million promised before 1990) and huge amounts of drought and refugee relief (for instance £34 million was offered by the EEC in October 1984 and the UN sent \$375 million of food and medicine between November 1984 and February 1985). Inadequate port facilities and the Ethiopian government's tendency to use food supplies for political purposes have meant that the estimated 6½ million people who are starving often do not receive the supplies intended for them. Food aid will be needed for Ethiopia for at least the next ten years even were the situation immediately to be "normalised" and the weather pattern to revert to usual.

Djibouti is not immune to the refugee problem although within its borders an uneasy peace reigns. Some 35 000 Ethiopian refugees, mainly from neighbouring Eritrea, have flocked there. In a total population of some 220 000, the refugees are a visible reminder of the troubles beyond Djibouti's borders and the Gouled government has tried unsuccessfully to contribute to regional pacification through treaties of friendship with Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Kenya.

5.3 The Great Powers and the Horn of Africa

The historical dimension of the Horn's strategic significance has already received attention. What have been the perceptions of interest and resulting actions of today's Great Powers in the region? Both the USA and the USSR have been active but this activity is characterised by an uncertainty or even fragility in their relations with client states. Until 1977 the USA was a firm supporter of Ethiopia while the USSR's relationship with Somalia was extremely close. 1977 was the year of the great "turnaround" in alliances and only Djibouti with its large French naval and military base has remained constantly in the Western camp.

Of the two Superpowers, the USSR is the more visible and has supplied the greater amount of arms and equipment to its clients. While support for a threatened Marxist government such as Ethiopia's is a natural component of the Soviet Union's foreign policy, its presence in the area is also part of its wider aim to compete visibly with the Western presence in Africa and Asia, to monitor US movements in the area and to gain a say in Red Sea politics. This preponderance is to some extent offset by the general pre-dominance of the USA in the wider Middle East/Gulf region. Chester Crocker,

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, stated in April 1983 that the US presence in the Horn was "an appendage of US interests in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean". Overall, therefore, a rough parity of influence exists. Within Africa, the USA's awareness of the Horn's importance is illustrated by the fact that 67% of US arms transfers to the continent go to the Horn.

In 1980 the Americans negotiated a \$20 million military sales credit agreement with the Somali government in return for United States access to Somali airfields and ports, especially Berbera. This Red Sea port, formerly a Soviet base, requires expensive refurbishment if it is to be effective, but, much to the disappointment of the Somali government, the United States has done little more than a patching up job on the airbase and no US troops are permanently stationed there.

The Soviet Union's more visible presence in the Horn can be traced back to its close relations with Somalia since the early 1960s. It is possible that the USSR backed the 1969 coup which brought Barre to power and in 1974 he signed a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union. In 1977 came the significant reversal in Great Power relations in the region when the USSR and Cuba assisted Ethiopia with an airlift, troops and equipment in its offensive against Somalia in the Ogaden. This consolidated the USSR's new friendship with Ethiopia's Mengistu but naturally led to the expulsion of Soviets and Cubans from Somalia and the abrogation of the 1974 treaty. Why should the USSR have done this? The uncompromisingly Marxist complexion of the Mengistu government may be one part of the answer, and so may the USSR's desire to gain credit with the OAU by acting in support of its principle that colonial boundaries should not be changed. Furthermore, Ethiopia is much larger and potentially far more valuable as an ally than Somalia. From its base on the Ethiopian Red Sea island of Dahlat, the Soviet fleet is in a good position to monitor naval activity in the area, and this was no doubt also a factor in the Soviet-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship signed in November 1978. By that year the Eastern bloc presence, mainly Soviet, Cuban and East German, in Ethiopia made it the apparently dominant Superpower in the region, in a position not only to further global strategies involving the area, but also to contribute to its destabilisation. Brzezinski said in 1979 that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden", thereby demonstrating that the USSR's involvement in regional politics had wider implications for East-West relations.

6. South Africa and the Horn of Africa

In 1941 South African troops assisted in the "liberation" of Somaliland and then, on 19 May, South Africa's General Dan Pienaar accepted the surrender of the Italian army which marked the end of Mussolini's East African empire.

Since the end of World War II, however, decolonisation, the formation of the Organisation of African Unity and South Africa's policy of apartheid have ensured that this country's relations with the Horn of Africa have dwindled to the point of disappearance. At the very end of 1984 the news that Foreign Minister RF Botha's secret visit to East Africa might have included Somalia caused something of a sensation. Rumours circulated that this country might be negotiating with Somalia for SAA landing rights, thereby radically reducing flying times to southern Europe and Israel, saving between R40 and 50 million per annum and circumventing the OAU's ban

on landing rights in member states. By 11 January 1985 it was even being suggested that South Africa was to establish a military/naval base at the Somali port of Kismayu. Thereafter, the denials started: from Somalia which claimed that the Democratic Front for the Salvation of Somalia had spread the rumours to embarrass Mogadishu and from the South African government which confirmed that Mr RF Botha had met President Barre, but that the subject of discussion was the MNR's use of Mogadishu as a staging post to Mozambique. The more fantastic rumours proved groundless but the element of fantasy remained in the claims by a former Congo mercenary, Francois de Villiers, that the Department of Foreign Affairs owed him a sum, variously stated as between R1 million and R2,5 million for "introducing" them to the Somali government.

What then, if any, are the possibilities for South Africa in this region? Full diplomatic relations are as unlikely here as anywhere else on the continent. So long as Ethiopia remains uncompromisingly Marxist there seems little likelihood of South Africans following the footsteps of Dan Pienaar into Addis Ababa and beyond. Somalia, however, does seem to offer certain possibilities, for two reasons :

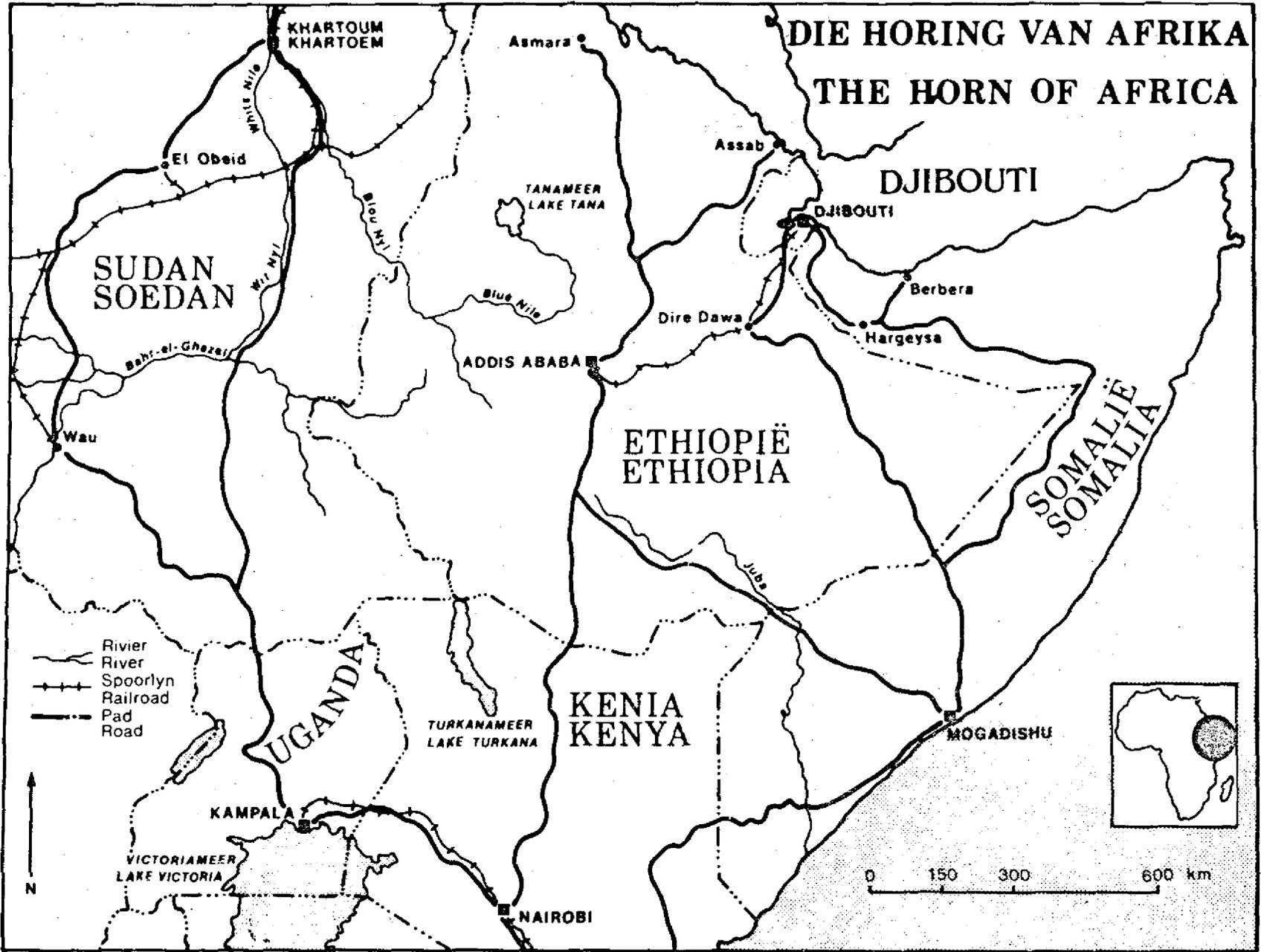
- 1 Its extreme poverty and underdevelopment suggest the possibility that, like Cape Verde which, when the arrangement was first clinched, was part of socialist Guinea-Bissau, refuelling and landing rights might be arranged. The comparative prosperity enjoyed by the formerly desolate island of Sal with its hotel, restaurant, enormous duty-free shop and the revenue and employment they generate cannot be ignored by a country as poor as Somalia.
- 2 Somalia is a country that suffers noticeably from a lack of skills and capital. It is also a country with considerable unexploited mineral resources including petroleum and uranium, whose road communications require improvement, and whose agricultural potential is hampered by the lack of dams and irrigation projects. South Africans are skilled in all these areas and so long as the Mogadishu government remains committed to co-operation with the "West" it is just possible that their assistance might be welcome.

Conclusion

The outlook for the Horn of Africa is not an optimistic one. Endemic warfare and the uncertain climate will probably persist and the refugee problem is therefore unlikely to diminish. Great Power involvement in the region is certain to continue because of its strategic implications. Ethiopia and Somalia are not so firmly tied to their Soviet and United States patrons that they could not change sides again and it is unlikely that peace and prosperity will come to the region, unless the Great Powers together impose a settlement of disputes and promote a concerted programme of development. The chances of such an outcome are painfully slim.

The region does, however, possess potential for development through its mineral and, in the case of Ethiopia, its agricultural resources. It is therefore suggested that South African capital and expertise might conceivably play a rôle, although political considerations are likely to hamper efforts in this direction. The area's strategic importance for both the USA and the USSR ensures that whatever the problems of the region and however great its economic weakness, it will remain an important factor in international politics.

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THE HORN OF AFRICA**



Source: *Africa Institute Bulletin*, Africa Institute, Pretoria, 1977, P 107.