

Relate  
1475

STATEMENT  
BY CONGRESSMEN DON BONKER (D-WASH) AND PAUL TSONGAS (D-MASS)  
TO PRESIDENT CARTER  
CONCERNING U.S. POLICY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Thursday, January 26, 1978

Mr. President: We have recently returned from a twelve day factfinding mission to the Horn of Africa. We met with four heads of state during our trip, including a rare session with Col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam of Ethiopia.

Attached is a copy of our report to Congress which provides an account of our meetings and an assessment of the current political situation in the Horn. In the report we also examine U.S. policy options and set forth our findings and recommendations.

Nowhere in Africa is there more potential for major instability and violent crises than in the Horn. Not even in Southern Africa are the problems as complex and acute. Nor on the African continent is there an area where the potential for East-West confrontation is greater or strategic questions more important. For the United States, both our security interests and those of our close allies are threatened. For Africans, the challenge of self-determination, the unraveling of established borders, and indeed the survival of some governments are at stake.

In recent years there has been an emerging uncertainty as to precisely what U.S. interests are in the Horn Region and what priority these interests should have in determining U.S. policy in Africa. Unfortunately, the rapid unfolding of events in the Horn, accompanied by rising passions regarding the Soviet and Cuban presences there, have not been conducive to formulating a viable and well-balanced U.S. policy toward the region.

Obviously this is a critical time for U.S. policy in the Horn of Africa. Actions and statements by the U.S. during the past year have made it difficult for Ethiopia to regard our official policy of total neutrality between disputing states as credible. Our apparent disinterest in helping Ethiopia--perhaps on the basis of its Marxist Government and sordid human rights record--has left a gap. At this point the Ethiopian Government has no viable alternative to Soviet domination. One wonders whether history is not repeating itself, reflecting Cuba's experience following the Revolution there. Quite legitimately, the U.S. is concerned about the massive Soviet supply of arms to Ethiopia which is unprecedented in scope and magnitude in African history. But at the same time, unless the U.S. pursues a prudent course, we risk the danger of treating Ethiopia

2.

simplistically, i.e. as a satellite of the Soviet Union rather than as an independent country seeking to hold itself together and repel an invading force.

This is not to imply that the U.S. should ignore the gross violations of human rights in Ethiopia, some of which we witnessed personally. Rather, it is through a policy of engagement that the U.S. has the best hope of encouraging respect for human rights in Ethiopia. Appointing a high-level ambassador and increasing our level of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia would be appropriate gestures of our good will, and representative of our commitment not to abandon the people of Ethiopia with whom the U.S. has had close historical ties.

At the moment, the largest challenge for U.S. policy looming very immediately on the horizon is the possibility of an Ethiopian attack on Hargessa and Berbera, to be used as a bargaining lever in effectuating a withdrawal by Somalia from the entire Ogaden area. In our opinion, this would greatly alter the present situation by making Ethiopia (backed by Soviet forces) an invader. It would also increase the prospect of sympathetic Arab states becoming directly involved on behalf of Somalia in the conflict.

Mr. President, we are encouraged by the willingness of yourself and other members of the Administration to meet with us and seriously consider our views. We hope the findings and recommendations which follow will be helpful in arriving at a better understanding of the complexities which underlie conflicts in the Horn of Africa. For our part, we look forward to working collaboratively with the Executive Branch in the interest of shaping a responsive and appropriate strategy for helping to bring peace and ease tension in that part of the world.



## FINDINGS

### THE HORN OF AFRICA

- \* The political situation in the Horn of Africa today is volatile and potentially dangerous. The Russian involvement in the Horn has proved both disrupting to the states involved and disturbing for U.S. security interests. The worst-case scenario would have the Soviets controlling or influencing potentially all but one (Sudan) of the countries in and around the Horn.
- \* No country in the Horn is so stable and secure that it cannot be threatened internally or externally--Communist activities and coup attempts are never remote possibilities.
- \* There are legitimate security implications for the U.S. and her allies in the Horn of Africa.
- \* Recent Soviet activities are incompatible with African nationalism and threatening to countries striving to maintain self-determination. While not wanting to minimize the serious nature of these activities, the recent experience of Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia suggests that in the end African nationalism is a more powerful political force than Communism in the African continent. The U.S. should recognize this, for, left to their own devices, African nations can resolve their disputes both collectively and individually far more effectively than the super-powers can do it for them.

### OGADEN CONFLICT

- \* Somalia-Ethiopia conflict in the Ogaden is serious and threatens the peace of the entire Horn. The conflict over the Ogaden will not be resolved militarily and a negotiated settlement appears unlikely at this time.
- \* The Ogaden is an area deeply rooted in conflict between the two countries, intensified by the fact that most Somalians inhabit a region belonging to Ethiopia, now at war due primarily to heavy Russian military aid to Somalia.
- \* The war is not just military adventurism, but it is an issue deeply felt at the grass roots in both Ethiopia and Somalia. It is a rallying point for political and military leaders in both countries engaged in the conflict.

- \* The OAU has proved ineffective in dealing with the Ogaden conflict. African leaders are understandably nervous about the Ogaden issue because it represents a possible "unraveling" of African borders--thus, they hold clearly to OAU's 1964 recognition of existing boundaries.

#### ETHIOPIA

- \* Addis Ababa is in a seige of terror and violence. Massive quantities of Russian military equipment and Russian-Cuban personnel are being sent to Ethiopia, through a major airlift program and the port of Mombassa in Kenya.
- \* Col. Mengistu is a thoughtful and determined, but unstable, leader who has permitted Russia to influence Ethiopia's political and military affairs, and allows terror and killings to purge opponents and solidify his power. His policies are seen in the context of a "revolutionary struggle" taken from post-Czarist Russia.
- \* Eritrea continues to be a vexing issue for the Derg, as it was for Haile Selassie, but Ethiopian control is unlikely due to religious and tribal differences that exist in the internal disarray in Addis.

#### SOMALIA

- \* Somalia's annexation plans for a "Greater Somalia" are a source of major problems in the Horn. President Siad Barre appears interested in ending the conflict in Ogaden through negotiation, but that includes a form of "self-determination" for the inhabitants of Somalia.
- \* Somalia is in desperate need of security assistance and, if none is provided, will lose in the Ogaden. Possibly Harghessa and the strategic port of Berbera may also be threatened, which could prove politically fatal to Siad Barre and pose security problems for the U.S.

#### SUDAN

- \* Sudan feels threatened by Ethiopia on one side and Libya on the other. President Nimeiri is willing to assist (equipment and even one brigade) Somalia if supported by OAU, Arab League, or the U.N. The Sudanese are helping the Eritreans in various non-military ways in their struggle against Ethiopia.
- \* President Nimeiri is a responsible and moderate leader who is promoting local autonomy and economic development that could be a model for all Africa.



## KENYA

- \* Kenya is militarily weak and may prove vulnerable to surrounding states. She is somewhat paranoid about an impending Somalian attack in the north and is preparing a case for an accelerated defense program.
- \* While presently allowing Russia to use her ports and roads to send supplies to Ethiopia to help fight against the Somalians, Kenya's greatest concern is with Ethiopia, and for that reason she could be enlisted in a strategy to contain Soviet influence in the area.
- \* The post-Kenyatta period could well be marked with political turmoil and uncertainty that could prove damaging to western interests there.

## EGYPT

- \* Egypt has expressed concern over Soviet activity in the Horn of Africa and is prepared to support efforts to contain and impede their influence.
- \* President Sadat has moral, religious, and political ties to Arab brothers in the Horn and has already demonstrated his support by giving arms (\$30 million) to Somalia and supplies to Sudan. He attaches great significance to North Africa and feels the U.S. should be more actively involved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The U.S. should make clear its position of total neutrality between the disputing states in the Horn of Africa.

a. We should speak out against the Somali incursion into the Ogaden and urge that boundary issues be negotiated through the United Nations, the OAU, or among the states involved.

b. The United States should express its concern over a possible Ethiopian invasion into Somalia, specifically the Hargessa-Berbera area. Should the Ethiopians cross the border into northern Somalia, there will be regional warfare involving the Somalis, Egyptians, Sudanese, and perhaps other Arab League states.

c. We should cease criticizing Ethiopia simply for accepting Soviet equipment. Faced with the well-trained and equipped Somali forces in the Ogaden, Ethiopia had no choice if it hoped to regain what it considers its territory.

d. The United States should treat Ethiopia as an independent country, not as a Soviet satellite. We should encourage African nationalism which runs counter to Soviet-Marxist influence, particularly in Ethiopia. We must avoid putting Mengistu and Ethiopia in the position that we put Castro and Cuba in ten years ago--i.e., having no place to go except to the Soviet Union. Rather than cutting off our relations with Ethiopia, they should be strengthened to nurture Ethiopian nationalism as an alternative to Marxism.

e. The United States should use its influence to see that full rights and privileges are extended to the Somali inhabitants of the Ogaden section of Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

2. The U.S. must get involved politically in the Horn to ameliorate existing problems through negotiation.

a. The U.S. should promote alliances among affected states (Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Egypt, Djibouti, Eritrea) that encircle Ethiopia--to demonstrate concern and opposition to Soviet interest and activities in the area.



b. The State Department should explore additional policy options that can make us more effective in the Horn of Africa, while refraining from encouraging third parties to assist Somalia in ways which would allow her to do more than provide for her own defense.

3. The U.S. should voice deep concern for human rights in Ethiopia and object to Russia's complicity and support of what is happening here.

a. The terrorism and killings in Addis Ababa are not only repugnant to the Free World, but offer no hope of long term peace or reconciliation of competing groups in that war-torn country. Without such reconciliation, there is no end in sight to the bloodshed and fear.

b. The U.S. should make clear to Ethiopia that our concern is not ideological, but for outside influence and overall instability in the area, and Ethiopia's excesses that lead to human rights violations.

c. By contrast, praise should be given to President Nimeiri of Sudan for his policy of "reconciliation" and freeing of political prisoners, including adversaries who attempted a coup last year.

4. The U.S. should continue and even accelerate economic humanitarian assistance to all of the countries in the Horn.

a. There is still no substitute for helping the people, regardless of the political situation. Most African leaders realize and value such aid and their political future rests with a contented population.

b. In part the conflicts in the Horn have been nurtured by neglect and considerable need. We find the best cure to revolution and regional wars is a stable economy and people being cared for. This is the sort of thing the U.S. does best.

c. Sudan's Nimeiri should especially be blessed with U.S. support because of his policy of local autonomy--in fact, Sudan has the potential of becoming a model for all of Africa. Somalia desperately needs help

because of recurring droughts and Western neglect in the past. Siad Barre has obviously placed a high priority on economic development and the state's economic planner is quite impressive. We have a chance here to demonstrate the success of U.S. assistance vis-a-vis the Russians. It is a contest which we cannot loose.

d. Ethiopia is a special case. Col. Mengistu's preoccupation with the war and his internal revolutionary struggle leave little time for economic problems. Ethiopia, primarily because of our 30 year relationship, has a good base and potential for aid programs, and we saw more Western countries involved in Ethiopia than anywhere else. But diplomatic relations between our two countries are rapidly deteriorating and economic-humanitarian assistance may be our only link to that beleaguered country. We feel it is essential that this link continue, for the benefit of the people involved and because of the need to demonstrate there is an acceptable alternative to Russian Marxism and terror.

e. The U.S. should be willing and prepared to offer assistance immediately to Djibouti which recently gained its independence and is in danger of losing it through a shattered economy.

f. As for Eritrea, the U.S. should not be indifferent to the suffering occurring in that territory as a result of its efforts to regain an autonomous relationship with Ethiopia. Options such as providing greater assistance to Eritrean refugees should be pursued.

g. As part of the U.S.'s substantially expanded humanitarian aid to the Horn, immediate steps should be taken to establish Peace Corps programs, particularly in Sudan and Somalia. In discussions with government officials in both countries we sensed a willingness to discuss the possibility of Peace Corps involvement.

5. That the U.S. strongly denounce Russian motives and activities in the Horn of Africa.

a. Its strategic objectives in the Horn of Africa and around the Red Sea-Indian Ocean jeopardize detente and are cause for U.S. alarm and possible response.



b. It threatens the peace and security of African states in the area. Russian-equipped Somalia precipitated the war in Ogaden, and now large quantities of Soviet military equipment and personnel to Ethiopia has proved exceedingly dangerous to the area.

c. The Russian "grand strategy" for Africa includes exploitation of that continent's valuable resources, a form of neo-colonialism that should be strongly rejected by Third World countries.

d. Russia-sponsored ports and bases in and around the Red Sea threaten the flow of world commerce through that vital area.

6. The U.S. government should do more to educate the American people, and particularly the Congress, of the political situation in the Horn of Africa.

a. Our foreign policies are influenced greatly by public opinion, which is molded primarily through the media. Often coverage is exaggerated and too late for sound decision-making.

b. Vietnam is still too fresh and the desire to not become involved in another conflict too convenient, the comparisons between civil wars in those two continents too obvious for our government to act assertively. But there are distinct political and strategic issues that should be emphasized.

c. Egypt's Sadat can ill afford to become involved in the Horn, particularly through generous arms supplies to Somalia when his own military situation is what it is. He jokingly said, "I am even acting like a "super-power," but in reality he is saying there is a void on the Western side and someone has to fill it. He is a courageous leader and, like other former Russian clients, he knows first-hand what the Kremlin is seeking to accomplish in the Horn of Africa.