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# Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden: The United States, the Horn of Africa, and the Demise of Détente

Louise P. Woodroffe

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# **BURIED IN THE SANDS OF THE OGADEN**

**The United States, the Horn of Africa,  
and the Demise of Détente**

**Louise Woodroffe**

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*"Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden": The United States, the Horn of Africa, and the Demise of Détente*

LOUISE WOODROOFE

“Buried in the Sands  
of the Ogaden”

*The United States, the Horn of Africa,  
and the Demise of Détente*



LOUISE WOODROOFE

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# Introduction

At the beginning of 1977, the United States and the Soviet Union were still engaged in an era of détente, a reduction of tensions between the superpowers largely developed at the start of the decade by former U.S. president Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. However, the honeymoon period was over. In addition to problems over issues of trade and human rights, détente had suffered because of disagreements over Third World events in Chile, the Middle East, and, most recently, Angola. Furthermore, the term had become highly controversial in the United States as the successive Republican administrations' foreign policy came under attack from both the left and the right of the political spectrum, to the point that President Gerald Ford dropped use of the expression during the 1976 election campaign. Still, Moscow and Washington desired progress on the joint communiqué on Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) signed by Brezhnev and President Gerald Ford in Vladivostok on 23 November 1974, and both sides entered negotiations in good faith. Bilateral relations were certainly struggling when Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as president of the United States in January of 1977, but the two countries had every hope that the new American president and the old Soviet leader would inject new life into the proceedings.

Détente aimed to reduce tensions, targeting such diverse issues as arms control, trade, technology, the division of Europe, and the competition for the Third World. But because Nixon and Brezhnev could not agree on the last issue, they coated over their differences and attempted to make progress in areas where they could find accommodation to the other's point of view. This ambiguity led to repeated clashes over the Third World. First, the Soviets felt that they lost a key ally in Chile when a Western-leaning military coup ousted the democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende president in 1973. That same year, the superpowers had relied on the hotline to successfully bring about a ceasefire in the October Yom Kippur War in the Middle East, in which U.S. ally Israel had beaten the Soviet Union's Arab allies. However, the United States had then proceeded to exclude the

Soviet Union from subsequent peace talks. Moscow, hoping that détente would mean that Washington would recognize it as an equal power, had felt bruised by these instances, but not to the point of renouncing détente. For the United States, frustration over the failings of détente came to the forefront in 1975–76 during the next major competition in Third World Angola. With the support of Cuban troops, the Soviets were able to achieve their desired outcome when the Marxist MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) defeated the U.S.-backed FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (*Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola* [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola]). Given that Kissinger had intended détente as a means of influencing Soviet behavior in the Third World, the case of Angola demonstrated to the U.S. government and the American people that their version of détente was not working.

These previous crises in the Third World raised the stakes of the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to the point that neither side was prepared to see another client lose. The scene was thus set for a confrontation over the next Third World flare-up. In 1977, the impoverished country of Somalia invaded its equally poor neighbor, Ethiopia, in an attempt to conquer Ethiopian land populated by ethnic Somalis. The region of the Horn of Africa had already received military support from the superpowers and therefore contributed peripherally to the Cold War competition between the two. However, when the Soviet Union and Cuba sent military advisors and troops to assist their new Ethiopian ally in repelling the attack in late 1977, this small border war became a major Cold War hotspot. Despite occurring during the era of détente, the Soviet Union and the United States could not come to an understanding on handling the dispute. The subsequent American reaction exposed fault lines within the U.S. government, which led to a serious confrontation as to what superpower détente really meant to the United States. The issue of the Soviet intervention became such a concern to some members of the Carter administration that they attached progress on other bilateral issues to Soviet behavior in the Horn. Specifically, the crisis undermined the key project of arms-control discussions, leading President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to claim that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden."<sup>1</sup>

This oft-repeated phrase has for almost thirty years defined the Carter administration's response to the Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa in 1977–78 and the subsequent demise of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The assertion hinted at both the ineffectual nature of the administration's foreign policy and Moscow's failure to realize how seriously Washington felt about active Soviet support for the spread of communism into the Third World. Such a controversial statement is the obvious starting point for assessing the American response to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, but it invites the risk of either trying to prove or dis-

prove it. In fact, the relevant documents from the Carter administration illustrate that the reaction was far more nuanced and complex than Brzezinski's allegation implies. The same documents also show that the Horn and SALT were indeed linked, even if it was the national security advisor who made it happen.

The American response to the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia is important for several reasons. First, this was one of the first foreign policy predicaments after the fall of South Vietnam. The American reaction demonstrated the possibilities and limitations of U.S. foreign policy after the national crisis of confidence brought about by the long war in Indochina. It influenced the shift of President Carter's stance toward the Soviet Union from one of conciliation to one of confrontation and set a new course in American foreign policy, which would continue with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Second, the crisis demonstrated the extent to which the Cold War had moved beyond Europe. In fact, the continental order was by the mid-1970s rather stable and the status quo had been recognized through the Helsinki Accords of 1975. The superpowers instead took their competition almost exclusively to the Third World, and there is no doubt that the events in the Horn were part of that process. Moscow dropped Somalia for the bigger prize in Ethiopia and Washington adopted Somalia to counteract the Soviet presence in Addis Ababa. Though the regional players pursued goals that had nothing to do with the desires of the superpowers, the cynical switching of allies by the United States and Soviet Union was done in the old sense of zero-sum game thought processes. There was no oil at stake, little strategic importance, and only limited pressure from allies to get involved. There was a competition for the hearts and minds of the people of the Horn of Africa. Yet, it is not a story of superpower manipulation of junior partners. The regional players were able to use the Cold War mentality to manipulate the superpowers to arm them heavily merely with the threat of turning to the enemy for assistance.

The conflict in the Horn, as illustrated by Brzezinski's quote, did not remain on the list of Third World conflicts in which superpower involvement affected the countries involved and had little immediate impact on the larger Cold War.<sup>2</sup> This particular crisis occurred at a time when the United States and Soviet Union were engaged in a period of *détente* and were searching for a new and less dangerous way to wage the Cold War. Whether they liked it or not, this search for a new emphasis raised the stakes of their competition in the Third World. For Moscow, the series of agreements that resulted from *détente* were a way of moving its competition with the United States beyond the race for arms and technology that it was losing. If the competition became one of ideology, then the Soviets felt they could win. Washington, for its part, intended *détente* to draw Moscow further into the international system so that the United States could better influence its rival's activities, particularly in the Third World. Thus, though the Soviets did not believe they were breaking the rules of *détente* by sending massive military

assistance to aid the beleaguered Marxist regime in Ethiopia, the United States certainly thought so. On the heels of Soviet involvement in Angola in 1974–76, the Americans felt they needed to test whether they could make the Soviets play by their rules in Ethiopia. As it turns out, they could not.

Once the major weakness the two differing perceptions by the two superpowers of détente was exposed, fault lines within the Carter administration solidified, turning the American response into a fight to determine the course of its entire foreign policy. The competing philosophies of President Carter's two top foreign policy advisors, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, became headline news as they advocated radically different approaches. Vance encouraged détente, diplomacy, and dealing with regional problems on a local level. Brzezinski, on the other hand, endorsed negotiation only from a position of strength and the idea that American policy should reflect the view that the entire world is inextricably intertwined. As such, he did not support détente as it was. At the center of the debate, however, was Carter himself. By the end of his term, the president would shift from Vance's route to the hard line advanced by Brzezinski. The discussions with the Soviets over their role in the Horn played a critical role in this shift, causing the region to have a major effect on bilateral relations and ultimately leading to the downfall of détente.

Nothing in Ethiopia's history suggested it would become such a focal point of the Cold War. Prior to the revolution of 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie had defined twentieth-century Ethiopian history. The former Ras Tafari Makonnen, by determination, will, and happenstance, had risen through the ranks of the aristocracy and Addis Ababa bureaucracy to be declared emperor on 3 April 1930.<sup>3</sup> As ruler of the lone never-colonized African country, the sovereign who was small in stature but large in presence would soon capture the imagination of many of the leaders of the world as the first victim of World War II.

After the war, Washington established itself as the main international player in Addis Ababa, though this was even more an invitation from Haile Selassie than an objective of American foreign policy. Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde referred to the period of the 1950s and 1960s as "the American era."<sup>4</sup> Not only did the United States use the base at Asmara as its main center for intelligence gathering on the Middle East but the two countries signed several arms agreements, giving Ethiopia one of the best-equipped militaries on the African continent. The two most important treaties, signed in 1953, granted Washington use of its military bases and made provisions for military assistance to Ethiopia for a period of twenty-five years. In addition, the 1960s saw the United States send one of its largest contingents of Peace Corps volunteers to its Horn of Africa ally, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided funding for new schools and universities.

Internally, Haile Selassie resisted change. While Ethiopia adopted a new constitution in 1955 that delineated the powers of parliament and the emperor, it es-

entially left intact the feudal system, which had governed the country for centuries. Haile Selassie retained powerful executive authority, which ensured any attempt at modernization would have to come from him. Though he made some efforts in this direction, particularly in the field of education, the pace was slow and land reform was almost nonexistent. The country remained poor and undeveloped, and the emperor faced opposition from young reformers, confronting a failed coup by members of his imperial bodyguard in 1960. Moreover, an insurgency in Eritrea began in earnest in 1961, as the province's resentment over its loss of autonomy finally overflowed into armed rebellion. The Lion of Judah found himself unable or unwilling to address the rising antipathy in the region, concentrating instead on augmenting his already high international standing. Therefore, while the revolution of 1974 surprised many outside observers, its seeds had been planted and taken root in the previous two decades. Still, the possibility that such an impoverished peripheral country would become a Cold War hot spot was at the time a very remote idea.

The Ethiopian revolution (described in more detail in Chapter 1) did not have immediate international ramifications. After Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974, the direction of the revolution was unclear, causing the international community to remain wary of backing the wrong people. The new rulers remained rather isolationist as they consolidated power. It was not until 1977, when Somalia tried to take advantage of the chaos in Addis Ababa and invaded its neighbor that the revolution took on a more international character as the besieged Ethiopians sought external assistance. The subsequent Soviet and Cuban intervention completed the transition from an internal revolution to a Cold War struggle.

The American response to the conflict on the Horn also served to highlight several of the more recent themes explored by Cold War historians, notably the roles of personality and ideology. The Horn tested President Carter's attempts to reassert morality as a central tenet of American foreign policy. It served as a catalyst for Carter's conversion from faith in East-West cooperation and arms control to the hard-line policy of containment favored by most of his predecessors. The conflict further emphasized the different philosophies of Carter's advisors and demonstrated the ways in which these views affected his own outlook.

The scope of this project focuses on American policy and perceptions. However, the lack of Soviet documentation (as well as those of the regional players) should not hinder this discussion. Soviet intervention in the Horn affected détente because the United States chose to make it affect détente. Moscow acted within its understanding of the rules. It was only in American eyes that the Soviet Union was violating détente's underlying spirit. That said, there are available documents from the USSR and East Germany relating to the Horn and translated by the Cold War International History Project in Washington, D.C.<sup>5</sup> While these files are incomplete and do not show the real policy debates within the politburo,

they are useful for assessing the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of the Ford and Carter administrations' perceptions of Soviet designs in the Horn. Additionally, Odd Arne Westad, in a recent book on superpower interventions in the Third World during the Cold War, used Soviet sources to uncover Moscow's motivations for getting involved in the Horn.<sup>6</sup> He provides the most thorough treatment of the role of the Horn in the larger Cold War and addresses the importance of the conflict in the downfall of détente, but he does not have the space to explore in depth the debates within the Carter administration.

A feeling of post-Vietnam impotence, a sense that Moscow intended to launch a new round of communist expansion, the ongoing debate in U.S. domestic political circles over the future of détente and fundamentally divergent understandings of its meaning between the United States and Soviet Union combined to pressure the Carter administration to look for leverage against the Soviets. SALT II seemed to be the obvious choice. After the crisis in the Horn, arms control was essentially all that was left of détente from the U.S. perspective. The differing perceptions of the concept by the two superpowers doomed it to fail, but it is important to note that neither side knew this at the time. Had the United States and the Soviet Union not faced off over the Third World, détente might have been prolonged. Neither side realized that it was going to disintegrate over events in places like Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan, but they were aware that SALT II was unraveling—if not entirely between the two governments, then with the American public and Congress. Ultimately, if there were no arms control, there was no détente, and SALT was essentially dead long before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Carter's subsequent withdrawal of the treaty from the Senate.

In the 1990s, several Cold War historians put together what came to be known as the Carter-Brezhnev Project and organized several conferences that included former government officials from both the Carter administration and the Brezhnev government. Their aim was to discover why relations soured and détente failed during the late 1970s. Several times, the historians directed the conversation back to the importance of the Horn to superpower bilateral relations.<sup>7</sup> Former Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, refused to believe that it was important at all, while a number of American officials emphasized how much the conflict over the Horn poisoned the atmosphere. In addition, none of the former Soviet officials could adequately explain why former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had blatantly lied to President Carter about the existence of a Soviet general in Ethiopia, an issue which administration officials felt had seriously undermined Soviet trustworthiness at the time. The Carter-Brezhnev Project produced a series of papers published in a volume edited by Odd Arne Westad.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, none of the chapters specifically addressed the influence of the conflict in the Horn on the fall of détente.

In the years of the conflict and those immediately following, books and journal articles on the Ethiopian revolution and subsequent conflict with Somalia fell into

two main categories: those that fretted over increased Soviet influence and waning American influence, and those that defended Soviet and Cuban intervention while blaming the United States for giving a “green light” to the Somali invasion of the Ogaden. Among the former are several articles published in the late 1970s in American journals such as *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *International Security*. Gerard Chaliand asserted in the spring of 1978 that the American “wait and see” policy was a good one and the Soviets were the ones who had misjudged the situation, culminating in the loss of Somalia.<sup>9</sup> In a more pessimistic but still American-focused critique, Steven David feared that the United States had suffered a major political setback on the Horn due to the Soviet ability to use “proxies” to fight there, something the Americans were unable to do. He continued that the concept of linkage was the only way for the United States to combat this.<sup>10</sup>

A contrasting interpretation was later offered by Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux. The authors argued that the “USA does bear considerable responsibility for the Somali invasion.”<sup>11</sup> They went on to defend Soviet and Cuban intervention as legal under international law and, in any event, relatively altruistic in its conception.<sup>12</sup> Halliday and Molyneux attempted to view the conflict from the Soviet perspective as well the Ethiopian perspective, but all scholars writing in the 1970s and 1980s had far more access to American political discussion than that of the socialist countries.

Other important contributions to the literature on the subject include books written from an Ethiopian perspective. The most important of these was written by Dawit Wolde Giorgis, deputy foreign minister under the Ethiopian dictator, Mengistu Haile Miriam. He was able to give insight into the perceptions of the Ethiopian side of the conflict that cannot yet be found elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> A later work by Andargachew Tiruneh also made use of Ethiopian documents to chart the causes and consequences of the revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Journalist Michela Wrong provides one of the best treatments of the Eritrean fight for independence. With extensive research and interviews of former fighters as well as former American, Soviet, and Ethiopian officials, Wrong has exposed the brutal treatment of Eritrea by Ethiopia, as well as the tragic decisions of the United States and Soviet Union as they failed to curb the excesses of the Ethiopian army in the name of Cold War one-upmanship.<sup>15</sup>

To assess the Ford administration’s response to the Ethiopian revolution, there are plenty of documents available from both the National Security Council staff and the State Department. Henry Kissinger’s dual role as secretary of state and national security advisor, no doubt, facilitated the high number of State Department documents found at the Ford Library. In addition, the volume of *Foreign Relations of the United States* that addresses the Ford administration’s policy toward Africa was recently released.<sup>16</sup> Telegrams back to the U.S. Department of State from the American embassy in Addis Ababa paint a picture of a policy in flux as the embassy officials tried to understand the direction of the revolution, deal with

kidnappings in Eritrea, and withdraw from the Kagnev Communications Station. Prior to Soviet involvement, the Horn did not create too much controversy within the administration.

On the other hand, the sparring contest between Vance and Brzezinski made headlines at the time and the two further fuelled the fire by releasing competing memoirs at the same time in the early 1980s. The national security advisor produced an insightfully candid chronicle of his time in the White House. He explained the mechanisms that he established to inform the president of national security issues, his ideology, and his differences with the secretary of state.<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski's provocative statement in his memoirs that "SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden" must be understood, not as the single impetus for the failure of SALT II, but rather as a key element of a chain of events that led to the withdrawal of the treaty from Senate consideration. Instead of arguing that an accumulation of events led to the downfall of détente, Brzezinski maintained that it was due to a cycle of reaction and overreaction, begun with the Horn, and brought on by the sense of weakness in the administration, with the debacle of the Soviet brigade in Cuba as a prime example. Cyrus Vance published a telling account of his time with the State Department, referring to his frustrations with Brzezinski and the struggles that led to his resignation.<sup>18</sup> He did not put as much emphasis on the conflict in the Horn as Brzezinski did, but this is telling in and of itself. These memoirs provide compelling insight into the workings of the Carter administration's foreign policy team, but at that point, the conflict (both the Horn and their personal debate) was still fresh.

Now, the picture of how policy developed is much clearer with the end of the Cold War and with the availability of documents from the period. At the Carter Library, the thorough and lively papers of Paul Henze, an Ethiophile and Brzezinski's key advisor on the region, demonstrate the pro-Ethiopia slant that made its way to the national security advisor. Yet, Brzezinski did not follow that advice. Ultimately, he did not specifically care about the conflict among the countries of the Horn, only that the Soviets were involved. The availability of State Department files is less consistent, but through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from the National Archives II and the Carter-Brezhnev Project at the National Security Archive, there is enough evidence to support the notion that the State Department generally held sway on how to handle the crisis at the regional level. Unfortunately for Vance, winning this battle may have caused him to lose the larger war on determining the future course of American foreign policy.

There have been surprisingly few books written on the Carter administration's foreign policy. The opening of the archives at the Carter Library and the anticipation of the declassification of State and Defense Department documents at the National Archives have encouraged many scholars to begin that process now, and this current dearth of scholarship should completely change in the next few years. As it is, Gaddis Smith produced one of the most relevant books on Carter's for-

eign policy back in 1986, though recently Robert Strong has made an important contribution to the subject.<sup>19</sup>

This book aims to contribute to the scholarship of 1970s détente by emphasizing the Horn's role in its downfall. Raymond Garthoff provides the most comprehensive critique of détente in the revised edition of his seminal work, *Détente and Confrontation*. One of the major developments in his thinking, from the first edition to the second, is that he originally treated détente as an *alternative* to Cold War, but in his reassessment, he characterizes it as merely a *phase* of the Cold War. The importance of this is that it turned the Cold War episodes during the 1970s into issues that *exposed* the failure of détente rather than *caused* it. Garthoff emphasized the role of the Third World in contributing to the straining of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and discussed the Carter administration's reaction to Soviet and Cuban commitment in the Horn in detail. He also made extensive use of newly available Soviet and American documents to give a two-sided picture of the disagreement. Garthoff believed it was the Cuban (seen as a Soviet proxy) involvement in Angola that first illustrated the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union understood détente in very different terms, something which would remain evident through events in the Horn of Africa and on through the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. While he addressed the influence of each individual Third World conflict on superpower relations, he groups them together as an arc of Soviet intervention that the United States found unacceptable.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, Keith Nelson used the availability of some Soviet and American archives on the subject of détente to argue that it was not a superficial concept and that it did represent good faith on both sides. This was possibly why the "betrayal" was felt so strongly by both Carter and members of the Brezhnev government. Nelson did address the issue of Soviet activities in the Third World, but he gave them no more weight than trade issues, economics, and the role of personality.<sup>21</sup> He centered on the motivation for détente and not the ultimate failure. Mike Bowker and Phil Williams, on the other hand, acknowledged the importance of the Soviet intervention in the Horn to the debates in the United States about détente. They ultimately concluded that the resolution of the conflict and the aftermath vindicated Vance, while acknowledging that the prevailing view in Washington afterward was that Brzezinski was right about the Soviets violating the spirit of détente.<sup>22</sup> One of those giving an academic face to this latter point of view was Harvard Professor Richard Pipes, who became a member of President Reagan's National Security Council team. He advocated a position that posited that the USSR involved itself in the Third World cynically to isolate the West, not out of any ideological motivation, and he further argued that maintaining peaceful relations with the Soviet Union played right into its hands.<sup>23</sup>

In a way, Brzezinski was right about détente, not that the Soviets were violating its spirit, but that they were not meeting American expectations of it. Some advocates of détente feared that its expectations had been oversold to the American

public. Even Cyrus Vance noted in early 1977 that "Ford-Kissinger have misled us on détente."<sup>24</sup> He realized that this would make his job more difficult.

We have been led to believe that linkages exist which do not and never did. We were led to believe that because agreements were reached in strategic-arena talks, the Soviets would not compete with the United States in other areas. This was false. Witness what happened in Angola and the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

The problem was that President Nixon and his national security adviser and later secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, had no choice but to oversell détente. The American public would never have accepted it unless they believed that the United States was getting more out of it than the Soviet Union was. The version they sold, however, would never have been acceptable to the USSR. Kissinger felt he could manage this, but such a contradiction could not survive a change in administration. In establishing the groundwork for détente, the United States and Soviet Union had searched for areas on which they could agree, leaving more contentious issues to be dealt with later. Mary Kaldor gives an excellent explanation as to why détente was doomed.

The détente of the 1970s failed both because it failed to tackle the roots of the arms race *and* because it did not permit systemic evolution in *either* the East or West. Moreover, détente demonstrated that the impetus for demilitarization and systemic change cannot come from above, especially in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was willing to give up their competition, but both sides hoped that it could be managed. Unfortunately, they appointed themselves as referees, and certainly not unbiased ones.

This book will stress several arguments. First, the conflict in the Horn of Africa was the American test case for the feasibility of détente. This has not been emphasized enough in discussions on 1970s superpower relations as the United States and Soviet Union had more urgent issues over which they disagreed. However, the documents of discussions between the major players illustrate the importance the United States put on Soviet involvement in Africa, and American willingness to raise such an unpopular issue, knowing it might undermine progress in other areas. Another subject may possibly have served this role as well, but Brzezinski and, more importantly, Carter chose this one.

Second, the Horn crisis served as an early part of President Carter's foreign policy education and, unfortunately for détente, what he learned was that the Soviets could not be trusted. Therefore, the Horn would act as a mechanism for changing Carter's attitude toward the Soviet Union to a much harder line. Though there were many steps in this education, the arguments between Vance and Brzezinski over the American response to the Soviet involvement in the Horn represented a much larger debate on the overriding strategy behind American foreign policy, which ultimately magnified the importance of the Horn.

Third, the Horn proved to the United States that the Soviet Union was not

living up to the American understanding of détente and that the entire process was untenable. From the American perspective, if the Soviets could still do what they wanted in the Third World despite loud complaints, then the only thing the United States would get out of détente was another SALT agreement, which the Soviets needed more than the Americans did. This was a difficult sell to an already skeptical Congress, a detail that Brzezinski emphasized rather vocally.

Fourth, the American response to the conflict demonstrated that the United States was unable to move beyond a Cold War mind-set. Détente and the failure in Vietnam had not done enough to enable American policy makers to reframe their world vision. Despite a few dissenting voices, the foreign policy establishment still viewed the whole world through the prism of competition with the Soviet Union and would do so until the disintegration of their rival.

Finally, and this will be explored in depth in the conclusion, hindsight proved that the whole conflict and its superpower involvement were utter disasters for all involved. There were no winners. Everybody lost. The USSR ended up supporting a brutal and ineffective ally who bled it financially and proved so unpopular abroad that it did nothing to enhance Soviet prestige. Washington appeared to have supported a Somali invasion of Ethiopia, a mistake that ultimately served only to highlight the appearance that the United States was a vulnerable giant. The apparent lack of a plan created an image that the Carter administration had picked a fight over something arbitrary. Soviet ignorance as to the importance the U.S. government put on the issue was in part their fault, but they might be forgiven for thinking they should take this disagreement about as seriously as the United States took Soviet objections to American actions in Chile or the Middle East. For Ethiopia, Soviet and Cuban assistance propped up a regime that terrorized its people, reorganized its agricultural system to disastrous effects in the well-publicized famines of the 1980s, and kept it one of the poorest countries in the world. Somalia lost the war and Siad Barre kept a tenuous hold on the country for another decade before warlords overthrew him. Currently, the country is a failed state. Eritrea, who came close to defeating the Ethiopian army before Soviet and Cuban assistance helped Mengistu beat back its rebellion, had to endure more than a decade of repression at the hands of Ethiopia. Eritrean rebels helped liberate all of Ethiopia from Mengistu, finally gaining its independence in 1992, but the two countries are now enemies divided by a disputed border.

This book will tell the story chronologically, including this introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter 1 will trace the Ford administration's response to the Ethiopian revolution. The new president was sworn into office just one month before members of the Ethiopian military deposed longtime American ally, Emperor Haile Selassie. U.S. foreign policy, in the wake of the American withdrawal from Vietnam and ultimate fall of Saigon, was in a transition phase in its dealings with the Third World, which led to a "wait and see" attitude toward the new regime. The relative strategic unimportance of the Horn contributed to

this outlook. However, this inattention represented a few missed opportunities and played a significant part in the difficulties facing Ford's successor, when the region took on Cold War implications.

Chapter 2 follows the first six months of President Carter's term. The Democrat's inauguration and denunciation of Ethiopian human rights conduct roughly coincided Mengistu's brutal execution of the other members of the military ruling committee. The administration was concerned with intelligence that indicated Ethiopia was reaching out to the Soviet Union for military support, but the ideological president begrudged undermining his human rights emphasis so early in his term to keep up a friendship with such a nasty regime. In addition, the Soviet Union's ally, Somalia, began reaching out to the United States, and the young administration rather carelessly agreed to supply arms to its new friend, just before Somalia invaded Ethiopia. In the meantime, President Carter also embarked on several missteps in his administration's relations with the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3 outlines the second six months of Carter's term. The administration was forced to suddenly backpedal on its commitment to Mogadishu and monitor what it hoped would be the fall of the Ethiopian dictator, while still pressuring Somalia to withdraw. In a major intelligence failure for the CIA, the Soviet Union caught the United States by surprise when it began sending massive amounts of military assistance to the beleaguered Mengistu, while Fidel Castro committed Cuban troops as well. The American foreign policy team struggled to catch up to the whirlwind of events that had overtaken their ability to make policy.

Chapter 4 focuses on the first half of 1978, during which the debate between Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski over the American response to the crisis made headlines and dominated many discussions of foreign policy. A series of impassioned exchanges between the two men illustrated that they were arguing about more than an isolated crisis, but they were actually competing for the ear of the president and the future of American foreign policy. During this period, American officials continually emphasized their concern about Moscow's actions in the Horn in bilateral meetings with Soviet officials, putting strains on other issues, most notably SALT II. Finally, the issue became very public with Brzezinski and then President Carter implying a linkage between Soviet activity in Africa and SALT.

Chapter 5 begins with an ill-fated meeting between President Carter and Foreign Minister Gromyko, which served as a turning point for the president's attitude toward the USSR. It then explains the fallout from that meeting and traces the subsequent chain of events that led to the withdrawal of SALT II from Senate consideration and the downfall of superpower détente. This period signaled a considerable change in the conduct of American foreign policy as Carter moved from largely heeding Vance's advice to relying increasingly on the opinion of Brzezinski. By the end of Carter's term, the United States and Soviet Union were back to fighting a full-fledged Cold War.

The conflict in the Horn played out in the unpredictable decade of the 1970s, during which relative international stability appeared to have been overturned. In reality, the era represented a temporary disguise of the truth of the bipolar world. The decade began with hopes for European and superpower *détente* and ended with revolution in Iran, a massive Soviet military foray into Afghanistan, and a turn toward superpower confrontation. Revolution and war in the Horn of Africa would be one snag in the intricate web of international order that unraveled throughout the decade, exposing the misconceptions of the relative power of the United States and the Soviet Union, and also of the Third World.

That the 1970s represented an aberration of the Cold War was not at all obvious at the time. Both sides were suffering economically from the burdens of their arms race and the United States was mired down in an unpopular war without end in Vietnam. In response, and to the benefit of both superpowers, by 1972 they had succeeded in concluding several arms control treaties on chemical weapons, anti-ballistic missiles, and nuclear arms. The United States shared some Western technology with the Soviet Union, and Moscow promised to assist Washington in extracting itself from Vietnam. In 1975, the Helsinki Accords, the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, formalized European borders, while calling for universal respect for human rights. Yet, at the same time, the superpowers' interests clashed in South Asia in 1971, in Chile and the Middle East in 1973, and in Angola in 1974–75. The Soviets got their desired outcome in South Asia, but *détente* was still in its youth. As the United States achieved its desired outcomes in Chile and the Middle East, Washington did not worry that it was failing to control Moscow's influence in the Third World, though the Soviet Union was clearly frustrated. Therefore, it was Angola that raised alarms in the United States that *détente* was not successfully reigning in the Soviet Union. Finally, Washington used the conflict in the Horn to test whether it could force Moscow to play by its rules. Its inability to do so signaled to the United States that *détente* had failed. The fallout from this manifested itself in renewed Cold War on both sides, which again played out to the detriment of the Third World.<sup>27</sup>