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U. S. foreign policymaking toward Ethiopia and Somalia (1974 - 1980)

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The US policy in the Horn of Africa during the 1970's was marked by the constraints posed by the international environment. The twin pillar policy formulated by the Nixon and Kissinger administration and later by the Ford administration was continued in its basic purposes by the Carter administration. However, Carter's policy major shift in 1979 – 1980 was not marked by the Soviet support for Ethiopia or the Somali abrogation of the treaty with the Soviets. The U.S. policy making apparatus tended to misunderstand indigenous political changes in the Middle East and particularly in Iran. In addition, human rights proved a failed attempt to devise an alternative strategy for rallying domestic support and to cope with international community.

Key words: Human rights, cold war, Ogaden, bureaucracy.

INTRODUCTION

The diagnosis of whether the Cold War was driven by material interests or ideological contestation is, arguably, not a simple question. As far as the Horn of Africa is concerned, its strategic location thrust it in the international arena as a potential crisis zone. The location of the Horn at the southern end of the Red Sea, near the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb and across the Arabian Peninsula, provides a prime spot to project power and to provide military support in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf¹. In fact, the Horn links the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia with the West through the Suez Canal and the Cape route. The proximity of the Horn of Africa with the Middle East led United States (U.S.) foreign policymakers to view it in a broader regional context. In fact, American presence in the area was necessary to maintain economic security of the West, stabilize pro-Western governments, prevent a potential blockade of the oil lanes by the Soviets, and keep the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean open for Israel and Israeli bound shipping.

Significantly, after 1973, a certain moderation in policies occurred both in Washington and in some Arab capitals. Thus by the end of the 1970's, several of U.S. former antagonists in the Arab World such as Egypt were

openly aligning themselves politically and militarily with the United States². Carter administration despite its rhetoric sought to continue the fundamentals of the Nixon Doctrine and Détente, wrapped up however under the Human Rights Doctrine^{3,4}. Increasingly, however, analysts have questioned whether the Carter human rights policy actually was implemented with consistency and that, in practice, the Carter policy was remarkably similar to the Nixon-Ford policy.

Initially, the Carter administration's policy towards Ethiopia and Somalia reflected the constraints in the international environment, the growth of Soviet power, the weakness of the dollar and the rise of the oil-producing Arab states. This policy, which sought to deemphasize East-West confrontation and reduce U.S. commitments in the periphery, was marked by a shift towards embracing human rights issues. However, the orientation and the major shift of Carter's policy in 1979 – 1980 were not marked by the Soviet support for Ethiopia or the Somali abrogation of the treaty with the Soviets. Indeed, domestic pressures, followed by the Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the partial failure to adopt a concrete foreign policy,

*Schwab, "Cold War", 7-8.

**Kupchan, "American Globalism", 592

¹ Lefebvre, *arms for the Horn*, 15.

² U.S. House of Representatives, "Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies"

³ Schwab, "Cold War", 7-8.

⁴ Richard Falk, *Human Rights and State Sovereignty* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981)

stemming from the structural bureaucratic conflicts, shifted toward policies reminiscent of the Cold War era. Thus, the arms for base accord with Somalia in 1980 and the Rapid Deployment Force along with Iran's regime change had transformed the quest for the Persian Gulf into an East-West confrontation⁵. In this essay we seek to analyze Carter's wholesale retreat from his initial approach and the confusion into which his foreign policies eventually descended, stemmed principally from his inability to gain domestic legitimacy for the administration's early world view or the policies associated with it. The evolution of Carter's foreign policies was therefore driven by contradictory sets of international and domestic pressures. International incentives, arising from the dynamics of U.S. decline, initially pulled the administration toward a strategy of adjustment to external change.

U.S. POLICY IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA (1971 – 1977)

The policy towards Ethiopia

Since the early 1970s, the Nixon administration was in a difficult position both in its domestic and foreign affairs. The American economy was in decline and inflation had cut deeply into the living standards of the American middle class⁶. In addition, the ongoing war in Vietnam raised questions about American moral legitimacy and economic feasibility. Thus, the Nixon administration reformulated U.S. global policy under the so-called Nixon doctrine and détente. The Nixon Doctrine has as a central thesis for the United States to reduce its need to act as a world policeman by looking to “the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the man-power for its defense”⁷.

The Nixon doctrine was designed to project a low profile overseas and to limit U.S. military commitments by promoting self-help⁸. While détente was based on the simplistic assumption that the Third World revolutions were inspired and financed by the international agents of communism, Nixon and Kissinger concluded that the solution was the self-containment of Soviet Union by utilizing itself into Western markets, finance, and credit⁹. A direct effect of this policy was that the United States should avoid direct involvement in peripheral areas and should furnish sufficient amounts of weapons to key allied countries of the Third World. In addition, a clearer argument on how the Nixon Doctrine utilized U.S. foreign policy, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird stated that the United States would be willing to “participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but that

America could not and would not conceive all the plans, design all the programs and execute all decisions”^{10,11}.

Nevertheless, the main ally of the United States in the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia and its Emperor Haile Selassie, did not thoroughly understand American global intentions. Since 1953, when the two countries signed a 25-year defense agreement, Ethiopia has been considered the key country in the region. Furthermore, within this agreement, Ethiopia, in return for the training and economic aid that the United States provided the Ethiopian army, allowed the United States to use a military communications base in Asmara. The base was named ‘Kagnew’ after the Ethiopian contingent that fought with the American troops in the Korean War. It was through this communications base that the United States came to establish a substantial military presence in the Horn and to cultivate intimate relations with Ethiopia under the leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie¹².

The Department of State used the base to receive messages from the U.S. embassy in Addis Ababa, while the United States’ world strategic communications network used the base as a relay station as well. However, since the early 1970s, the American policy regarding Ethiopia’s strategic importance began to shift, not only due to the Nixon Doctrine but also due to the improvement in satellite communications technology and the United States decision to construct a new base on the Indian Ocean Island of Diego Garcia. Despite the fact that the official U.S. position was one of technical rather than political reasons, which led to the scaling down of Kagnew, Diego Garcia had three important advantages: first, it had no indigenous population, which made the base less vulnerable to internal threat; second, it could fuel and harbor ships; and third, it was far from other countries and therefore not easily prone to attack by a neighbour¹³.

Moreover, Ethiopia had failed to undertake some basic reforms suggested by the U.S. Embassy under the rubric “stability with progress”¹⁴. These reforms included legal modernization, greater rights for Eritrea, devolution of power from the center to the periphery, and implementation of agrarian reform. In addition, the crisis of famine of 1972 – 1973, resulting in the starvation of around 200,000 people and the Eritrean army struggle, had begun to cut into the Ethiopian economy. In fact, there were evident signs of a looming social explosion in Ethiopia and the United States gradually began to distance itself from the Emperor. Despite these factors, Emperor Selassie believed that his personal relations with President Nixon could satisfy his arms request that

⁵ Carter Interview

⁶ Yohannes, “*The United States and the Horn*”, 68

⁷ U.S. House of Representatives 91 Cong, 2d sess.

⁸ Van de Linden, “*Nixon’s Quest*”, 13

⁹ Yohannes, “*The United States and the Horn*”, 68

¹⁰ U.S. House of Representatives, 91 Cong, 2d Sess.

¹¹ Wicker, In The Nation: Is There a Nixon Doctrine? 6 January 1970.

¹² ‘Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa’, Hearings before the Sub-committee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate; 4, 5 and 6 August 1976, 27.

¹³ Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 21, March 1977

¹⁴ Halliday and Molyneux, “*The Ethiopian Revolution*”, 218

was made in Washington in May 1973 during his last visit¹⁵. On the other hand, during this period, the American Congress established a counterbalance to the executive branch's military commitments in the Third World, which started from the Symington Committee hearings in 1970. This Committee which was headed by Stuart Symington, was examining for 18 months U.S. security commitments worldwide and finally scrutinized the political-military relationship between the U.S. and Ethiopia¹⁶. Moreover, the demising importance of Kagnew combined with the internal situation in Ethiopia and the Emperor's declining acceptance by the Ethiopian people resulted in the diplomatic rebuff of Selassie's arms request. On September 12, 1974, Emperor Selassie was deposed by the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee known as the Dergue, which soon established a Provisional Administrative Military Council. United States policy towards Ethiopia was not marked with a vast shift. Apart from other reasons owing to external factors which will be analyzed henceforth, Henry Kissinger, supported by the African Bureau within the State Department, did not risk the American credibility in longstanding MAP (Military Assistance Partner) partner¹⁷.

Additionally, there were several reasons lain within the Dergue's political character, which did not vastly change the American attitude. First, the early selection of General Aman Andom, who was believed to have a pro-Western orientation and of Eritrean nationality, could help towards a settlement of the Eritrean struggle; second, the American Embassy in Addis Ababa suggested that the Dergue was another version of Afro-socialism that "would not go too far"; third, the Dergue was divided into factions, and the United States favored the Amhara-Tigrayan faction; fourth, any nationalization programme would cause the cessation of international assistance and Ethiopian economy was heavily dependent on foreign assistance; and fifth, the regime lacked essential financial and human resources that would assist in the rise of socialism¹⁸.

However, American analysts misidentified the internal dynamics within the Dergue and in the summer of 1976, Major Sisay of the moderate faction was arrested and executed. The new dominant faction, lead by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, favored a pro-Soviet policy, repression of any civilian opposition and escalation of the war in Eritrea to ensure Ethiopian territorial integrity¹⁹. However, American misinterpretation was clear on every level of the Ethiopian revolution, and in a large part, the U. S. failed to understand the internal dynamics of

indigenous political change. This was proven by the fact that William Shaufele Jr., Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, believed that Ethiopia "could win" through increased military help²⁰. Furthermore, as Peter Schwab has argued the United States did not recognize that the new rulers approached the politically stultifying social system in Ethiopia by arguing that the old structures and traditions have to be eliminated rather than modified, and must be replaced by a new society in which each individual may develop personally, while participating in a fair share of the necessary work of the nation, even that which no one wishes to undertake²¹. In addition, under sustained pressure, the regime nationalized all banks, as well as industrial and commercial firms. Ironically at the same time the DOS viewed the nationalization activity as providing ample opportunity for American exports in Ethiopia²².

Foreign policymaking within the Middle East–Horn of Africa context

Since the oil crisis and the Arab–Israeli conflict of 1973, the United States developed a strong relationship with the moderate Arab countries. The Nixon administration, based on the "twin pillar policy," strengthened its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia, notably benefiting from the high oil prices of 1973, sought to establish itself as a regional power. Specifically, the Saudis helped the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to expel the Russians and tried to forge a closer relationship with Jaafar Nimeiri's Sudan²³. Given this framework, the moderate Arab states played a special role in the evolving struggle of Eritrea.

On the other hand, Israel's interest in Ethiopia, like that of the United States, revolved around Eritrea²⁴. The Israelis feared that the emergence of an independent pro-Arab Eritrean state would threaten their strategic interests in the Red Sea. Despite the regime change in Ethiopia, Israel continued to provide military assistance. Specifically within the complex regional framework, the United States tried to establish a policy of continuing arms supplies to Ethiopia, but in a manner of not deteriorating its relationship with the moderate Arabs²⁵. These calculations, however, evoked and promoted disputes and clashes within the American foreign policy establishment, mainly during the Ford Administration. Particularly, there were two sorts of debates regarding

¹⁵ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 142.

¹⁶ U.S. Senate, Security Arrangements and Commitments Abroad, Report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs by the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Arrangements Abroad, 91 Cong, 2d sess. (Washington D.C. 1970).

¹⁷ David Ottaway, "Ethiopia Gets New U.S. Arms", *Washington Post*, 26 August 1974.

¹⁸ Yohannes, "The United States and the Horn", 73

¹⁹ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 166.

²⁰ Department of State Bulletin, 30 August 1976

²¹ Peter Schwab, 'Human Rights in Ethiopia,' *Journal of Modern African Studies*,

14, 1, 1976, p. 155 and Observer, 'Revolution in Ethiopia . *Monthly Review* (July-August 1977).

²² DOS AN. D-750080-1049 "Ethiopia Land Reform" Foreign Service Despatch from Embassy Addis Ababa to Secretary of State, March 1975.

²³ Halliday, "U.S. Policy", 23-25.

²⁴ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 162

²⁵ Petterson, "Ethiopian Abandoned?" 633.

the policy towards Ethiopia: first, the delivery of the F-5 jets to the Ethiopian government in 1975 and Dergue's arms requests on the one hand, and on the other, the escalating Eritrean war and the consequent "secret" war between the Arabs and Israel. We should note though that, from 1975 until 1977, Henry Kissinger held both the posts of the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, the disputes within the Department of State appeared to be among the regional bureaus and specifically between the African Bureau and the Bureau for Near East and South East Asia. Indeed, historically, each Bureau within the Department of State tends to shape its own distinctive foreign policy, tries to gain priority for its own geographic area and resists any kind of abatement of its functions viewed as part of its essence²⁶.

In this instance, U.S. policy was based on the African Bureau, which desired to maintain American political credibility in the region and Henry Kissinger's support of U.S. global credibility²⁷. In fact, it seemed to be a consensus between State's globalists, African bureau alongside Israeli country experts resting on the following premises:

First, that the Arab support for Eritrea was not so great; second, if the U.S. cut off aid, Eritrea would be independent and aligned with Arab countries, which would give the Arab countries control over both sides of Bab al-Mandeb; third, if Eritrea became independent with an American permit, this would have a negative effect on Africa whose borders are not subject to change; fourth, the U.S. was the only arms supplier in Ethiopia for years and should continue, in the wake of Soviet assistance in Somalia and the global credibility of the U.S.²⁸. In addition, African analysts also held the view that Arab states exaggerated the Israeli threat to justify their intervention.

On the other hand, Arab specialists in the Bureau of Near East, in the wake of Dergue's arms request in February 1975, held the view that the Israeli security argument was flawed. Their main arguments were that if Arab states wanted to attack Israeli ships, they could do it anyway since they controlled the whole Red Sea and Egypt had successfully blockaded the Bab al-Mandeb during the 1973 war. Second, the legitimacy of Dergue support, due to the Soviet support in Somalia, was doubtful mainly because the political character of the Dergue with the hard-line leadership was alien to the U.S.²⁹.

It was obvious that the American administration was involved in a highly perplexed and complex situation, and in union with the domestic political constraints, made any outmaneuvering extremely serious. Therefore, U.S. policies focused on not antagonizing the Arab states and on maintaining ties with Ethiopia, simultaneously.

²⁶ Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics", 38.

²⁷ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 161

²⁸ Ibid. 161

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE HUMAN RIGHTS DOCTRINE

In early 1977, and at the beginning of Jimmy Carter's presidency, the strategic situation in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East was extremely complex. As mentioned before, the Israelis claimed that Arab States threatened their security in the Red Sea and supported Ethiopia while the Arab states, which now developed stronger ties with the United States, viewed Israeli foreign policy as hostile and aggressive. On the other hand, briefly, the new American President, Jimmy Carter, recognized the impact of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal and the poor economic situation of America's image.

Specifically, regarding its policy towards Africa, the Carter administration sought to deemphasize the East-West confrontation and that the developing countries should be removed from this context. Therefore, regional conflicts in Africa should not be allowed to become proxy conflicts of the Cold War, but ought to be based on the belief of "African solutions to African problems"²⁹. More importantly, the Carter administration believed that human rights should play a crucial role in determining foreign policy toward the Third World. Fortunately, American Congress had started with the Jackson-Vanik amendment in 1974 to show interest in human rights, and during Carter's presidency it appeared keen on addressing human rights violations³⁰. This amendment which was co-sponsored by Senator Henry Jackson made the granting of "most favored nation" trading status to the Soviet Union contingent upon Soviet reducing restrictions on Jewish emigration.

It is important to note, however, that human rights were linked to American self-interest with ethics and expediency combined and there were domestic ramifications included in the human rights policy^{31,32}. From the start of his administration, Carter spoke frequently and forcefully in support of human rights and their central role in the formation of United States foreign policy. He was also generally supportive of Congressional efforts to codify human rights concerns. In his inaugural address, the President emphasized his commitment saying, "Our commitment to human rights must be absolute...."

Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedoms elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights"³³. In short, some contend that the Carter policy was long on rhetoric and short on action.

By the time Carter took over in the United States, the

²⁹ Jackson, "Jimmy Carter" 53-58

³⁰ Ibid. 43.

³¹ Forsythe, "American Foreign Policy", 38

³² Inter-national Financial Institutions Act, Pub. L. No. 95-118, ? 701, 91 Stat. 1067, 1069 (1977) (current version at 22 U.S.C. 262d (1982)).

³³ Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter," 20 January 1977, in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1977, Book I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), 2-3.

faction of the Dergue, led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, had won the internal strife within the Dergue after a bloody shootout in February 1977. This new dominant faction supported the view that to ensure Ethiopian integrity and their own political survival, the Dergue should find an ideological compatible arms patron, and this was the Soviet Union. Personally, Mengistu thought that the human rights rhetoric of the United States combined with a wider perception that the American administration would eventually undermine the Dergue regime in Addis Ababa contributed to their establishment of a military relation with the U.S.S.R.

At this time, the pursuit of the human rights agenda to terminate military aid to Ethiopia seemed as the pretext rather than the true basis. In short, there was a great deal of difference between the rhetoric and the reality of the Carter human rights policy as applied to aid distribution. The Carter administration did not significantly withdraw material support from repressive United States friends. It should be noted here that at the beginning of Carter's presidency, the African Bureau at the DOS remerged as a decision making centre on African issues. Carter and some of his top-ranking officials including the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Andrew Young and the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Richard Moose which were supportive of the bureau's general inclination not to view every Africa crisis in terms of U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Consequently, the African Bureau pursued a hands-off pro Ethiopian policy partly owned to its inherently anti-Somali biases³⁴.

Thus, in truth though, the factors attributed to the American decision was the decline of the Kagnaw base's strategic importance, the struggle in Eritrea that threatened American personnel in Asmara, the lack of great economic interests in Ethiopia and finally, Israel's proven naval and military capability to protect its interests.

During the spring of 1977, the Carter administration discussed the possibility of forging closer ties with Somalia. One potential reason for this should be attributed to the Arab states policy toward Somalia, particularly, Saudi Arabia. The main Saudi goals at this time were to stabilize Nimeiri in Sudan and to eliminate pro-Russian influence in the Red Sea, fearing a Soviet expansion³⁵. Therefore, Saudi Arabia promised extensive military and economic aid to Somalia to deter the Soviets. In fact, the U.S. was reluctant to foster relations with Somalia largely due to the Soviet presence in the country, which believed was not under threat, despite Soviet assistance to Ethiopia, the fear that military supplies could lead to greater American involvement, should the border tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia erupt in a war. Finally, members of the National Security Council, including Paul Henze believed that, in

the long term, the United States should not break away from Ethiopia³⁶.

In late July 1977, Somali troops began to invade the Ogaden region and in early August, the border clashes between Somali and Ethiopian troops erupted into a full-scale war. During the same period, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance stated that the United States considered supplying military assistance to Somalia. Consequently, the Somali President, Siad Barre, interpreted the intention of the United States to supply Somalia with defensive arms as "forthcoming attitude"³⁷. Besides that, the Somali invasion of Ogaden rested on several other reasons: the collapse of Ethiopian relations with the United States, Ethiopian internal conflict with Eritrea, the support of Arab States, the fact that Moscow would remain neutral and Siad Barre's personal opportunism. On the other hand, President Carter refused to support Somalia, instead he pressured for a peaceful resolution through the Organization for African Unity (OAU). Moreover, Carter insisted on his long-term policy towards Africa, which included "African solutions for African problems". However, the Carter administration's policies underestimated the diplomatic pressure on Somalia in order to preempt Soviet and Cuban involvement, the willingness of the international community to resolve the conflict and OAU's mediating efforts. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union decided to support Ethiopia largely due to the fact that Addis Ababa seemed more committed to the Marxist-Leninist ideology than the Somalis, which were more obligated to Somali irredentism and nationalism and Ethiopia's strategic position and its dependence upon Moscow, after the break up with the U.S.

The war in Ogaden produced a larger clash within American bureaucratic apparatus, which was not quite a simple difference of opinions between the National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance. Brzezinski presented Soviet involvement in the Horn as a paradigm case of Soviet assertiveness. In his view, the war in Ogaden was the evidence of a Soviet grand design and Moscow's opportunism in the Third World³⁸. Moreover, Soviet advances in the area represented a setback in Washington's attempt to establish better relations with the Soviet Union. Thus, Brzezinski proposed that the United States should first deploy a major U.S. carrier task force in the region, support Somalia and funnel arms to the Eritrean nationalists to damage the Soviet Union both politically and militarily³⁹. In addition, Brzezinski argued that Soviet behavior in the Horn was a preposterous notion and should be linked to SALT negotiations and other arms control agreements. On the other hand, the Department of State (DOS) was supportive of negotiations, sensitive to African nationalism, and was of the

³⁴ William Hyland, U.S. Policy Options, Washington Review, Special Supplement on the Horn of Africa, May 1978, 23-30.

³⁵ Halliday, "U.S. Policy", 22-27.

³⁶ Jackson, "Jimmy Carter", 84-96

³⁷ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 176

³⁸ Yohannes, "The United States and the Horn", 87

³⁹ Makinda, "U.S. Policy", 370-372

opinion that this conflict should not be seen as an East–West confrontation. Therefore, the DOS “justified” Soviet intervention in the defense of Ethiopian integrity⁴⁰. Cyrus Vance argued that the U.S. should, in the long term, improve relations with Ethiopia and opposed Brzezinski’s suggestion of linking the war in Ogaden with SALT and deploying a task force. In his views, any task force deployment would steer the conflict. Thus, Washington’s decision to formulate the five-point strategy regarding the Ogaden was also designed toward bringing cohesion to the U.S. foreign policy⁴¹. After the Ogaden war, Vance was inclined toward a more Cold War approach, supporting the view that the U.S. should supply arms to Somalia in order to promote a nonaligned country and prohibit the restoration of Soviet influence. Vance’s shift can be attributed partly to the fact that the ongoing crisis in Eritrea had larger geopolitical implications (for the involvement of Arab World), while Ethiopia continued to receive military and logistical support from the Soviets and the Cubans⁴². Another reason reflecting (Vance’s views) was the acceptance of the American-imposed condition of Somali withdrawal from the Ogaden, which was basically the reason why the DOS supported the idea of military aid to Somalia after March 1978⁴³.

In general, Carter remained supportive during the Ogaden crisis that there should be a peaceful resolution of the conflict, he maintained also that if the Somali inhabitants of the Ogaden wanted self-determination, the appropriate method was international mediation rather than military conquest. Finally, despite the fact that Carter had some ideas of an autonomous Ogaden under Ethiopian protectorship, the administration wished to avoid imposing any kind of an American solution to “an African problem” which was basically Carter’s own belief for Africa’s misfortunes⁴⁴. In general, this policy shows that there was no major shift from the administration’s declared foreign policy priorities, and mainly the human rights agenda. In the case of the Horn of Africa, none of the domestic, economic and security elements tied to human rights was under real threat.

REORIENTATION OF THE POLICY UNDER THE CARTER DOCTRINE

From August 1978 until early 1979, the Carter Administration faced open criticism from the Republicans about the inconsistency and incoherence of U.S. policy during the Ogaden War. House minority leader John Rhodes (R-Ariz) commented that “the deterioration in our foreign policy posture in the last two years is really hard to contemplate... You’ve got to say that something really

went wrong as far as the foreign policy is concerned”⁴⁵. In addition, the Republicans attacked Carter on his failure to contain Soviet military assistance in Angola and for the invasion of a Zairian Province by Zairian insurgents based in Angola⁴⁶, with a statement issued by thirty eight Republican senators claiming that “Carter administration was unwilling or unable to acknowledge that the Soviets and Cubans will continue to exploit situation opportunities in Africa”⁴⁷. In addition, in November’s mid-term elections, John Dalton, Virginia’s Governor stated: “send the message all over the state that the Carter administration is soft on Communism”⁴⁸. Finally despite Paul Henze’s reports to Zbigniew Brzezinski to visit Ethiopia in order to persuade the government to make a good will gesture, the congress sought to enforce the Hickenlooper and Gonzalez Amendments⁴⁹, which required the Administration to halt any aid provisions in Ethiopia, in response to Ethiopia’s unwillingness to pay \$30 million to 25 multinational U.S. firms in compensation. The last fact clearly shows Carter’s worries regarding the implantation of a coherent policy⁵⁰.

Meanwhile, the abdication of the Shah in Iran and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan prompted the reorientation of Carter’s foreign policy, which until then continued to rely on the twin-pillar concept for the Middle East region founded upon Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Iranian military was considered America’s main surrogate in the Persian Gulf and the transformation of Iran into a radical Islamic regime constituted a major threat to American interests in the Middle East. Apart from that, there were clear divisions within the government regarding the policy toward Iran. The Department of State and the regional bureau favored accommodation with the regime and attempted to foster good relations⁵¹. On the other hand, Brzezinski and the NSC, including other top officials in the White House, firmly supported the Shah. It was clear that Carter’s foreign policy was driven by contradictory sets of international, domestic and bureaucratic pressures⁵².

To have a concrete response to this context of interrelated factors, the Carter Administration rearticulated its foreign policy declaring that “any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an attack in the vital interests of the U.S., and such an assault will be repelled by any means

⁴⁵ U.S News and News of the World Report, February 5, 1979

⁴⁶ Double Reverse: How the U.S. Policy in Africa Changed, Washington Post, June 25, 1978

⁴⁷ Republican Statement, May 3, 1978, pp. 1160

⁴⁸ Washington Post, August 20, 1978

⁴⁹ Memo, Henze to Brzezinski, March 1978, “3/78” Folder Box/Special: 2, NSA Staff Material, Carter Presidential Library

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kupchan, “American Globalism”, 607 and Spiegel, “The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict”, 60-61.

⁵² Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation: “American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan”, 828-48, C. Haberman and A. Krebs, “Arms Expert Resigns,” New York Times, 4 May 1979, Leslie Gelb, “The Rightists’ Brigade,” New York Times, 16 September 1979 and Leslie Gelb, “Beyond the Carter Doctrine,” The New York Times Magazine, 10 February 1980,

⁴⁰ Yohannes, ““The United States and the Horn”, 87

⁴¹ Makinda, “U.S. Policy”, 370-377.

⁴² Discussion Paper, SCC Meeting, March 27, 1978

⁴³ Memo, Brzezinski to Vance, March 1978, “3/78” Folder Box/Special: 2, NSA Staff Material, Carter Presidential Library

⁴⁴ Los Angeles Times, September 21, 1977

necessary". Furthermore, the uncertainty associated with radical change, which U.S. believed that it could pose a threat on conservative and moderate neighbours and the fear that the Soviet Union might take advantage over Iran, led the American decision makers to focus on Soviet Union. In addition, U.S. policy planners supported that a coherent policy for Southwest Asia crystallized only with increasing concern about the Soviet threat and the predominant conceptual framework: East against West⁵³. Anticommunism evoked the image of a direct challenge to United States interests and served justification for broader and concrete policies of intervention and containment. Another contributing factor was the calculations made by the Congressional Budget Office, that is, if the Soviets controlled the Persian Gulf and Saudi oil was disrupted for only one year, this would cost the American economy \$272 in export earnings and 20% inflation⁵⁴.

To pursue its tougher approach on foreign policy, the Carter administration decided to seek military bases in Kenya, Oman and Somalia, increase U.S. Naval presence in the Indian Ocean and create a Rapid Development Joint Task Force. However, analysts in the congress did not share Washington's view and supported that there was no immediate need for military bases in Africa. In addition, the African Bureau continued to pursue a policy of "open lines" with Addis Ababa. Indeed, their main assessment was that the Suez Canal and the Bab al-Mandeb could be sealed off easily in a crisis, while the American vital interests were not seriously impaired during 1967 and 1975, when the Canal was closed. Furthermore, United States had nurtured strategic partnerships with Sudan and Kenya that made the Somali option unnecessary. In particular, the U.S. provided Kenya and Sudan economic and military assistance, Mombasa was an attractive base for the U.S. Navy, while Khartoum has aligned itself closer with the Saudis and the Egyptians.

Despite the criticism towards establishing a military relation with Somalia, officials within the administration expounded the view that the United States could rely entirely on Saudi bases in a crisis that would not directly threaten Saudi interests. Moreover, the United States could not use the Israeli option so as not to antagonize the Arab States directly. Although, Diego Garcia could supply the U.S. Navy during a crisis, it was too distant and no sea-lift operations could take place within five to six days. Advocates of the U.S.-Somalia agreement argued that Somalia was strategically flexible, which could help the U.S. defend sea lines more easily¹. They supported that Berbera's location, 1350 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, would save two to three days to sea lift time over Mombasa and Diego Garcia. Moreover, Somalia could act as a rear staging area in Suez Canal, Persian Gulf, or

Arabian Peninsula military contingency, and as a forward staging area for crises in and around the Bab al-Mandab. On 22 August 1980, the DOS announced the United States and the Republic of Somalia had finally reached an agreement which included access to military facilities at Port Berbera along with military and economic aid to Somalia. In addition, the U.S. agreed to train Somali military personnel in the following years.

The doctrinal policy by Carter affected the administration's personnel. Andrew Young, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations resigned, while Henry Richardson, the NSC Chief for Africa, Paul Warnke, Head for the Arms Control and Disarmament and Leslie Gelb, Assistant Secretary of State, were all replaced by globalist thinkers and Cold War policy advocates. The reorientation of Carter's policy led also to a change towards Ethiopia. The United States seemed ready to take the risk of possibly alienating Ethiopia by embracing Somalia. In fact, the Carter Administration, while there were clear indications of human rights abuses in Somalia, criticized only the Ethiopian government for its human rights record. However, the most contending issue that showed Carter's willingness to establish a military relation with Somalia was the Somali involvement in Ogaden. Fears that an American military assistance in Somalia could turn the Ogaden conflict into a full-fledged war were outweighed by the new orientation in the official stance of Carter administration. Actually, the statements of American officials showed that their attitude towards the Western Somali Liberation Front had changed, largely due to broader strategic considerations.

Conclusion

American foreign policy toward Ethiopia and Somalia clearly demonstrated the internal dynamics that shaped the policy rationale. The Watergate scandal, America's declining economy with stag inflation, the War in Vietnam and the rise of the oil-producing Arab states influenced the American foreign policymaking. Republicans and Democrats used a different rhetoric but similar in nature: American disengagement from peripheral areas and arms supplies only to key countries in the Middle East region, namely, Israel and Iran. With regard to the basic purposes, Jimmy Carter continued the policy of détente and the Nixon Doctrine. However, Carter was determined that the legacy of Vietnam demanded an open and honest government and Carter believed that human rights could restore domestic support for foreign policymaking. At the core of Carter's early policies lay a pragmatic strategy of adjustment to the United States declining power

Indeed, the human rights policy proved a failed attempt to devise an alternative strategy for rallying domestic support. By the end of the Ogaden War, the Republicans openly criticized the government for its failures. To have a concrete response to domestic criticism as well as the bureaucratic resistance and clashes between low level

⁵³ Kupchan, "American Globalism", 607

⁵⁴ Nye, "Energy and Security", 3-4.

⁴⁰ Lefebvre, "Arms for the Horn", 200-210.

and top level officials, the Carter administration decided to abandon the human rights agenda in pursuance of a more doctrinal policy. It was clear that human rights that evolved around the core of international liberalism did not have the ideological power of anticommunism. On the other hand, the U.S. tended to misunderstand indigenous political change and often mistook nationalism and neutralism with Communism.

In the case of Iran, domestic criticism combined with the fact that the U.S. focused on the Soviet threat to the exclusion of events in the Persian Gulf could explain the Cold War rationale. In fact, the Soviet threat in Iran was exaggerated, in a period where the Soviets were engaged in a war in Afghanistan. However, the Carter Doctrine offered a more flexible and simple option for the U.S. Analysts, John Dumbrell and Alexander George argue that doctrinal policies are often designed to mobilize public opinion while the Cold War was easier to legitimate in the public's thinking because it rested on a simple negative stereotype. Therefore, the Iranian revolution that posed a danger for moderate and conservative neighbours, the fear that the Soviets might take advantage of the situation in Iran, domestic pressures from the Republicans, and the military-industrial complex as well as bureaucratic clashes pushed the Carter administration toward the Cold War rationale.

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