U.S. Intervention in the Horn of Africa Amidst the End of the Cold War
Author(s): Peter J. Schraeder
Published by: Indiana University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4186903
Accessed: 28/02/2011 15:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=iupress.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Indiana University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Africa Today.
U.S. Intervention in the Horn of Africa
Amidst the End of the Cold War

Peter J. Schraeder*

The end of the Cold War initially was hailed by academics and policy analysts as providing opportunities for a reexamination of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa.1 Much to the chagrin of those seeking significant changes in U.S. Africa policies, however, the end of the Cold War seemingly reinforced the historical tendency of Washington to ignore African issues in favor of other regions of greater concern, such as Western and Eastern Europe and, more recently, the Middle East.2 As succinctly noted by Michael Clough, former Senior Fellow for Africa at the Council on Foreign Relations, the White House’s response to the end of the Cold War was the adoption of a "wavering, hypocritical policy" in Africa best characterized as "cynical disengagement."3 Specifically, in the absence of the rallying points of Soviet expansionism and anti-communism, the myriad of seemingly insuperable socio-economic and politico-military problems besetting the continent have reinforced the historical tendency within the U.S. policymaking establishment to relegate Africa to "other" countries that presumably know Africa better, and therefore are better equipped to respond more effectively. The purpose of this article is to clarify the impact of the end of the Cold War on U.S. Africa policies by focusing on the evolution of U.S. foreign policy toward the Horn


*Peter J. Schraeder is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Loyola University of Chicago, and is a specialist of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. He has lectured and carried out research in nine African countries, including Djibouti, Kenya, and Somalia. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including Intervention into the 1990s: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Third World (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), and United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis & Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1993)
of Africa from 1991 to the beginning of 1993.4

Ethiopia: Renewing the Ties in the Post-Mengistu Era

When guerrilla advances during the first four months of 1991 signalled the impending overthrow of Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam, the U.S. intensified its involvement in negotiations between the Ethiopian government and the guerrilla opposition by sending a high-level delegation to Addis Ababa that included Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Irving Hicks, Robert C. Frasure (a member of the National Security Council), and former Senator Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minnesota) who acted as President Bush's personal envoy.5 In addition to meeting with Mengistu, both Hicks and Frasure traveled to Khartoum to meet with Issaia Afwerki, leader of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and Meles Zenawi, the head of the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). The level of U.S. involvement in these negotiations intensified when, in the aftermath of Mengistu’s departure from power on May 21, 1991, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman B. Cohen flew to London to mediate personally between the guerrilla factions and a collapsing Ethiopian government.

The net result of U.S. involvement was a significant contribution to a transfer of power which largely avoided the bloodshed and clan conflict still evident in Somalia more than two years after the regime of Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown by a coalition of guerrilla forces. As part of an agreement that was publicly endorsed by Cohen on May 28, 1991, the TPLF took control of Addis Ababa and began putting together a broad coalition government that was expected to include representatives from all of the country’s major ethnic groups and political organizations. A critical element of the May agreement—which led to rioting in Addis Ababa—was U.S. support for a UN-supervised referendum in Eritrea to determine if the people of the territory desired independence. This decision to support regional self-determination through the ballot box—which in April 1993 led to a vote overwhelmingly in favor of independence—represented a significant change in U.S. foreign policy. Rather than giving unswerving support for the territorial integrity of the Ethiopian empire as had been the case from the 1950s to the 1980s, the U.S. endorsed a policy that questioned the concept of


Peter J. Schraeder
territorial integrity as enshrined within the charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Several factors accounted for the proactive U.S. response to events in Ethiopia. First, both the Mengistu government and the guerrilla opposition sought a greater role for Washington as a mediator between their conflicting claims. These positive signals coincided with rising pressures within the national security bureaucracies that comprise the executive branch, particularly the State Department's Africa Bureau, to avoid the policy disasters that had occurred in Liberia and Somalia. In both cases, U.S.-supported leaders were driven from power by coalitions of guerrilla forces which, after achieving initial victories, presided over the escalation of ethnic or clan-based violence. Having "learned" that policies of inaction potentially entail far greater costs than initially may have been apparent, the Africa Bureau sought immediate action in order to avoid another disaster in Africa. "We want to see law and order," explained a diplomat who was stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa during 1991. "What we want to do is facilitate a soft landing and prevent the kind of bloodshed that has affected Liberia and Somalia."7

The decline of Cold War competition in the Horn of Africa was an important element in the calculations of Ethiopian and U.S. officials. As far as several segments of the policymaking establishment were concerned, the hardline Marxist positions of both the Mengistu regime and the guerrilla opposition made support for either side highly unlikely during the 1980s. The decisions of both sides to modify their attachment to Marxism in the face of Soviet retrenchment at the end of the 1980s removed a major obstacle to the reestablishment of closer ties with Washington. "If this had happened five years ago, we wouldn't have been involved because in the Cold War, it would have been hard to work with the Marxists," explained Cohen. "Even two years ago," he continued, "it was hard for me to work with SWAPO (South West African People's Organization)," a reference to the difficulties of dealing with a guerrilla organization that maintained a strong attachment to Marxism prior to taking power in Namibia. "The big difference now," he concluded, "is that people talk about Marxism and people laugh."8

The end of the Cold War was also an important reason for the new U.S. position concerning the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. During the Cold War


2nd Quarter, 1993
era, when unimpeded access to a telecommunications center known as Kagnew Station and other facilities in Eritrea guided U.S. foreign policy toward Ethiopia, support within the national security bureaucracies for the territorial status quo remained virtually unquestioned. It was greatly feared that an independent Eritrea would terminate access to what at the time was considered to be one of the most valuable U.S. telecommunications centers in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. With the decline of the Cold War, the bureaucratic justifications for Ethiopia’s territorial integrity no longer rang true. Although portions of the national security bureaucracies, such as the CIA and, to a lesser extent, the Pentagon questioned whether an independent Eritrea would be financially insolvent and potentially susceptible to manipulation by "radical" foreign powers (such as Libya), the Africa Bureau successfully argued for a policy that supported the pursuit of self-determination through legal means. This position was based on the simple facts that the EPLF, which had been fighting for Eritrean independence for over thirty years, militarily controlled the entire region, and that the TPLF, although in favor of maintaining the territorial integrity of the country, was willing to recognize Eritrean independence if a majority of the population in the territory truly desired that.

An equally important aspect of the proactive U.S. response was the episodic involvement of the highest levels of the U.S. policymaking establishment, including President Bush, despite the fact that the White House never perceived the unfolding events in Ethiopia as constituting a crisis in the Cold War mold. For example, the need to create an orderly transfer of power in Ethiopia captured the attention of the White House when it became clear that a humanitarian disaster on a par with the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine was imminent. Already faced with a domestic uproar over the plight of Iraq’s Kurdish population—a group for whom no domestic constituency existed—the White House sought to avoid the public criticism that resulted from the Reagan administration’s slow response to alleviating starvation in Ethiopia. An integral aspect of this approach was a political calculation that domestic demands for higher levels of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia, already annually topping $150 million since 1984, would multiply dramatically in the event of ongoing civil war and bloodshed in a post-Mengistu era.

The delicate process associated with the emigration of Ethiopia’s Falashas, approximately 14,000 of whom found themselves stranded in Addis Ababa while awaiting departure for Israel, served as an even more important reason


for White House involvement in the policymaking process.\textsuperscript{11} The White House began paying greater attention to this issue not only because of ongoing congressional concerns with the Mengistu regime's practice of trading visas for arms, but also due to a private appeal to President Bush from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Shamir. Desirous of avoiding the political fallout that could have accompanied any deterioration of the personal safety of the Falashas stranded in Addis Ababa, Bush dispatched Boschwitz as his personal envoy and, in the aftermath of Mengistu's departure from power, sent a letter to Acting President Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan, requesting that the group be allowed to emigrate.

The highly publicized outcome of joint U.S.-Israeli diplomacy was a two-day airlift on May 24-25, 1991, dubbed Operation Solomon, in which more than 14,000 Falashas were flown to Israel in exchange for $35 million in "exit" fees.\textsuperscript{12} The operation was not unique, but rather represented the culmination of a series of airlifts that had resulted in more than 43,000 Falashas finding a permanent home in Israel by June 1991. An earlier episode in this process was a 1984 secret airlift—dubbed Operation Moses—of more than 7,000 Falashas who had fled to the Sudan as a result of the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine; a smaller airlift, Operation Joshua, evacuated some 800 more in March 1985.\textsuperscript{13}

Israel's involvement in Ethiopian affairs did not solely stem from a humanitarian interest in the well being of the Falashas. More fundamentally, it derived from Israel's traditional support of the Ethiopian central government as part of a more than two-decades long strategy of preventing the creation of an independent Eritrea. The reason for this support stemmed from a belief shared by many Israeli policymakers, especially prior to the 1990s, that an independent Eritrea undoubtedly would become another Arab-oriented (and anti-Israeli) state effectively turning the Red Sea into a hostile "Arab lake." In short, the Eritrean conflict became a southern extension of the Arab-Israeli conflict.\textsuperscript{14}

For its part, the Mengistu government discarded the anti-Israeli rhetoric, more common in the immediate aftermath of the 1974-77 Ethiopian revolution, due to growing problems with Ethiopia's primary patrons within the declining


\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of Israel's role in the Horn, see Lefebvre, Arms for the Horn, pp. 42-3, 133, 161-3, 261, 263.
Eastern bloc. In addition to witnessing the withdrawal from Ethiopia of Cuban troops and East German advisors, the Soviet Union informed Mengistu that the Soviet-Ethiopian military agreement would not be renewed after 1990. As a result, the Ethiopian government began looking, once again, to forge closer ties with the United States and its regional allies, most notably Israel. This rapprochement, in turn, contributed to strains in U.S.-Israeli relations, as the House Subcommittee on Africa expressed concern that Israel illegally had transferred 100 U.S.-supplied cluster bombs to Ethiopia as part of a secret deal to ensure the continued flow of Falasha refugees. Whereas opponents of U.S. aid to Israel argued that Tel Aviv was far from being a hapless victim of the Mengistu regime, and therefore the U.S. should adopt some form of sanctions, influential members of Congress, such as Representative Howard Wolpe (D-Michigan), former chairperson of the House Subcommittee on Africa, argued that Mengistu clearly was using the Falashas as "pawns" to blackmail Israel into replacing stocks of weaponry that the Soviet Union would no longer supply.15

A new era in Ethiopian domestic politics tentatively began in July 1991 with the appointment of an 87-member Council of Representatives that, among other duties, was to draft a new constitution and oversee a two-year transitional period to democracy. As one stage in this process, Ethiopia held its first-ever democratic elections at both the district and regional levels on June 21, 1992, and began preparing for national elections scheduled for 1993. Despite the fact that the elections were judged by international observers to be neither completely free nor fair, the State Department's Africa Bureau nonetheless announced that they represented an "historic" and "useful" exercise, and could provide the basis for a more democratic process in the future.16

The U.S. response to the democratization process is instructive in that it underscores the nascent beginnings of a renewed U.S.-Ethiopian "special relationship."17 Indeed, despite growing reports of a "low-intensity" guerrilla war between the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Oromo-based guerrilla forces of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Africa Bureau has downplayed the differences between the two sides, and has sought to maintain its role as a mediator in resolving ethnic

17. For an overview of the evolution of this relationship as written by a U.S. advisor to Emperor Haile Sellassie, see John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years (Algonac, MI: Reference Publications, 1987).

AFRICA TODAY
conflict in Ethiopia. As underscored by a country desk officer associated with the Africa Bureau, this policy should come as no surprise in that Ethiopia is still considered to be the "most attractive" of all of the countries of the region. Among the reasons cited were Ethiopia's large population and economic potential, the historic nature of U.S.-Ethiopian ties, the ability of the Ethiopian bureaucracy (unlike "others" in Africa) to "get the job done," a strategic location bordering the Red Sea, a Christian heritage that could serve as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalist movements, and Ethiopia's role as host to the headquarters of the OAU.

Somalia: Humanitarian Military Intervention in the Post-Siad Era

The overthrow of the Siad regime did not mean the end of conflict in Somalia. Rather than abide by an October 2, 1990, accord in which the major guerrilla groups agreed to decide the shape of a post-Siad political system, the United Somali Congress (USC), by virtue of its control of the capital, unilaterally named a Hawiye, Ali Mahdi Mohammed, president of the country. This move heightened the already tense relations between the Isaak-dominated Somali National Movement (SNM), the Hawiye-dominated USC, and the Ogadeni-dominated Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), as well as among scores of other, less organized, clan groupings.

In a move based on a strongly held Isaak belief that the north would continue to be victimized by a southern-dominated government, the SNM announced on May 17, 1991, that the former British Somaliland territory was seceding from the 1960 union and henceforth would be known as the Somaliland Republic. This event was followed by the intensification of clan conflict in the southern portion of the country between the USC and the SPM, which, in turn, was exacerbated by a regrouping of Siad's Darod clan groupings under the military banner of the Somali National Front (SNF). Moreover, a brutal intra-clan power struggle erupted in Mogadishu between forces loyal to interim President Mahdi, a member of the Abgal subclan of the Hawiye, and those led by General Mohamed Farah Aidid, a member of the Habar Gedir subclan of the Hawiye. In short, once the common political enemy no longer existed, traditional clan differences, exacerbated by the dictatorial divide-and-rule practices of the Siad years, made any hope of


19. Confidential interview.

national reconciliation highly unlikely.

Due to the end of the Cold War, the State Department's Africa Bureau oversaw a two-track policy that sought to limit U.S. involvement in what one career Foreign Service Officer (FSO) described as a "clan-based quagmire destined to last years, if not decades". First, the Africa Bureau argued that the U.S. should support the efforts of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to place the United Nations in the forefront of a multilateral effort designed to meet the humanitarian needs of the Somali peoples. However, a desire to avoid direct involvement in the politics of resolving ongoing clan warfare was clearly demonstrated by a U.S. vote on March 17, 1992, for a Security Council Resolution related to Somalia only after language calling for a UN-sponsored peace-keeping mission had been removed. Although a State Department official claimed that congressional concerns over "dramatically rising costs" associated with peace-keeping operations throughout the world was a major factor, Africans pointed to decisive U.S. support for a UN peace-keeping mission in war-torn Yugoslavia, and accused the U.S. of adopting a double standard concerning Africa.

The second element of the Africa Bureau's two-track policy, already evident in the immediate aftermath of Siad's departure from office, was that Britain, and especially Italy, should take the lead in their former colonial territories. This policy stance not only was applied to the resolution of intra-clan fighting, but also to the diplomatic controversy involving the secessionist Somaliland Republic. As demonstrated by its involvement in the "national reconciliation" talks held in Djibouti during 1991, for example, the Africa Bureau carefully avoided statements that went beyond the desires of either Italy or Great Britain, and therefore favored the preservation of the Republic of Somalia as originally constituted in 1960. "We'll deal with a legally constituted government in Mogadishu first because that is what the Europeans and especially Italy wants," explained an FSO in the Africa Bureau. "The most likely scenario in which we would recognize northern independence is if both the north and the south extend mutual recognition of the internal legitimacy of both governments, and this decision is diplomatically recognized by both Italy and Great Britain."

The Africa Bureau's strategy of limiting U.S. involvement in Somalia's


23. Confidential interview.
Peter J. Schraeder

Intensifying clan conflicts was slightly altered on August 14, 1992, when the White House announced that the Pentagon would coordinate a UN-sponsored, short-term humanitarian airlift of food aid designed to alleviate spreading famine in central and southern Somalia. Two weeks later on August 28, a contingent of 500 U.S. soldiers oversaw the first flight of four C-140 transport planes from their bases in Mombasa, Kenya, to a variety of drop-off points in Somalia. White House authorization of the operation followed in the aftermath of a UN agreement with General Aaid, the USC militia leader who controlled access to the port, which in turn permitted the deployment during September of a UN force of 500 Pakistani soldiers to protect food supplies and relief workers in Mogadishu. These forces were deployed with the support of four U.S. warships carrying 2,100 Marines. The White House also supported a Security Council resolution authorizing the deployment of an additional 3,000 UN troops into other parts of Somalia. This deployment was hampered, however, by the inability of the UN to reach any further accords with either Aaid or the multitude of other clan and militia leaders within central or southern Somalia.

As it became increasingly clear that the UN Security Council was incapable of generating the leadership necessary to stem intensifying levels of clan conflict and famine, President Bush announced in a live television address to the U.S. public on December 4, 1992, that U.S. troops would be deployed in Somalia to "create a secure environment" for the distribution of famine-relief aid. Five days later the first contingent of U.S. troops led by three teams of Navy SEALs (Sea-Air-Land Commandos) landed on the beaches of Mogadishu and secured the airport and the port. The U.S. military landing, designated "Operation Restore Hope," was carried out under the auspices of a UN Security Council resolution sanctioning foreign intervention. In the weeks that followed, over 36,000 foreign troops from over twenty countries (including approximately 24,000 U.S. military personnel) occupied various cities and towns throughout central and southern Somalia, and began the task of opening food supply routes, as well as creating distribution networks.24

The White House decision to deploy U.S. combat troops in Somalia was significant in that it previously was opposed by the national security bureaucracies. For example, several FSOs within the State Department's Africa Bureau strongly opposed direct U.S. military intervention, and instead favored a more proactive diplomatic approach that centered on resolving clan

---

differences, as well as pressuring the UN Security Council to take a more active role in military operations if deemed necessary. The CIA and the Pentagon also initially opposed the introduction of U.S. combat troops into Somalia. In a view characteristic of that adhered to by CIA analysts of the Horn of Africa, Robert M. Gates, Director of Central Intelligence, warned that "anarchy" was "so sweeping" and "the warring factions so firmly entrenched" that the U.S. was potentially setting itself up for the unintended long-term responsibility of maintaining stability in Somalia.25

One of the harshest critics of Operation Restore Hope within the U.S. policymaking establishment was Smith Hempstone Jr., the U.S. ambassador to Kenya, who argued that Somalia could become a quagmire for U.S. foreign policy. "Somalis, as the Italians and British discovered to their discomfiture are natural born guerrillas," explained Hempstone. "They will mine the roads. They will lay ambushes. They will launch hit and run attacks. They will not be able to stop the convoys from getting through. But they will inflict—and take—casualties."26 Taking such a risk, according to Hempstone, was ill-advised for the simple reason that Somalia does not constitute a country of vital interest to the United States. "Aside from the humanitarian issue—which admittedly is compelling (but so it is in the Sudan)—I fail to see where any vital interest is involved."27

The primary reason for the shift in U.S. policy was growing public and congressional pressures on the White House to "do something" to resolve what James R. Kunder, the head of the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, labeled the "world's worst humanitarian disaster."28 By August 1992, nearly nine months after fighting had broken out between rival factions of the USC, as many as 1.5 million of an estimated Somali population of 6 million were threatened with starvation, with approximately 300,000 Somalis already having died, including roughly 25 percent of all children under the age of five. As media reports of this extended humanitarian crisis increased in quantity beginning in July 1992, particularly in terms of live satellite broadcasts that portrayed images of starving Somali children on morning talk shows and nightly newscasts,29 criticism of executive branch inaction from a variety of quarters increasingly was taken more seriously by the White

27. Ibid.
House. In addition to being "bombarded with appeals" from private relief organizations, the White House found itself being criticized by prominent newspaper columnists. In the case of Congress, this criticism reached its height on August 3, 1992, when a bipartisan resolution co-sponsored by Senators Paul Simon (D-Illinois) and Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas), and calling for a more activist response on the part of the White House, overwhelmingly passed the Senate, followed by passage of this same bill in the House of Representatives on August 10. Indeed, according to a New York Times/CBS public opinion poll conducted just prior to the beginning of Operation Restore Hope, 81 percent of the U.S. public believed that President Bush was "doing the right thing in sending troops to Somalia to make sure food gets to the people there," with 70 percent believing that sending troops was even "worth the possible loss of American lives, financial costs and other risks."31

Critics of the Bush administration have suggested that presidential politics in an election year also played an important role in the White House's handling of the Somali crisis. According to this viewpoint, the White House only began paying attention when rising congressional and public concerns threatened to make Somalia a campaign issue in the 1992 presidential elections. Therefore, it should have come as no surprise that the President decided to announce the beginning of the humanitarian airlift of food on the eve of the beginning of the Republican Party national convention in August 1992. However, the upcoming elections also potentially served as an important political constraint on the White House's preferred course of action. Although senior administration officials strongly denied that political concerns associated with the upcoming presidential elections influenced the pace of policy, they nonetheless admitted that White House campaign advisers were "fearful of accusations that all the President cared about was foreign policy," and therefore "strongly urged him to take a lower public profile on all foreign issues" inclusive of Somalia "until after the election."32 Ironically, defeat in the elections removed any such constraints, allowing President Bush to initiate a major military operation that clearly was going to carry over into the newly elected Clinton administration. Yet critics still argued that President Bush was less interested in Somalia than in ensuring that the history books remember him as ending his term of office as a "decisive leader" as opposed to a


2nd Quarter, 1993 17
"vanquished politician."  

It also has been suggested that U.S. strategic interests, most notably maintaining access to military bases (such as the extensive U.S. naval base at Berbera), served as important underlying factors in the U.S. decision to militarily intervene. As demonstrated by U.S. involvement in Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in 1991, however, the end of the Cold war has made such arguments highly untenable, especially in the case of Somalia. In an interesting conclusion to a long-simmering policy debate over Somalia's strategic importance to the United States—which began in the mid-1970s and heated up following the Carter administration's decision to seek a security relationship with the Siad regime—the U.S. naval facility at Berbera turned out to be completely unnecessary for the massive deployment of U.S. troops and matériel associated with the war against Iraq.  

Indeed, although at first glance Somalia's strategic location—the cornerstone of "globalist"-inspired arguments seeking close U.S.-Somali security ties—made it a potentially important player in what in 1991 constituted the largest U.S. military operation abroad in the post-Vietnam era, the Berbera base was simply stripped of its fuel stocks and left dormant by military planners. This turn of events seemed to validate the position of critics who asserted throughout the 1980s that, even if one accepts globalist rationales for ensuring U.S. military access to the region, the Somali bases were unnecessary in light of other, more extensive, facilities readily available in the region.  

Regardless of the reasons behind the initiation of Operation Restore Hope, this action nonetheless signalled a significant departure in U.S. foreign policy in the Horn of Africa, as well as in Africa generally. U.S. troops were introduced not for the purpose of shoring up a valued client state, or to counter either real or perceived communist aggression, but for the sole purpose of guaranteeing the delivery of humanitarian relief aid to a population on the brink of starvation. The formulation and implementation of Operation Restore Hope also reflected a classic element of White House involvement in U.S. Africa policies: a desire to relegate responsibility to other powers that presumably are better able to resolve Africa's political and economic problems. Specifically, the Bush administration originally envisioned a short-term U.S.-led military operation that, once having achieved the immediate humanitarian objective of preventing mass starvation, was to be quickly replaced by UN peace-keeping forces directly responsible to the

33. Ibid.

34. For a discussion of the evolution of the policy debate over Somalia's strategic importance, see Lefebvre, Arms for the Horn, pp. 175-264.


UN Security Council. Toward this end, the Bush administration authorized a token but highly symbolic withdrawal of approximately 550 U.S. troops from Somalia on January 19, 1993, just one day prior to the inauguration of President Clinton. Most important, the Bush administration stated from the beginning of Operation Restore Hope that it wanted to stay out of Somali politics, and therefore relegated to the UN Security Council the responsibility of creating a new political system in Somalia.

The Bush administration's desires to quickly withdraw U.S. troops and to limit U.S. involvement in political reconstruction led to a growing rift between the White House and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who strongly favored a much more expanded politico-military role for the United States. Indeed, according to Boutros-Ghali and other critics, the U.S. was involved—whether it wanted to be or not—in the internal politics of the country as soon as U.S. troops landed on the beaches in Mogadishu. Most important, the military objective of ensuring famine relief only addressed the "symptom" of the more critical underlying problem of clan competition and warfare. If the political conflict is not resolved, and the remaining U.S. (and other international) troops are withdrawn from the country prematurely, argue the critics, one may witness the re-emergence of a similar (or worse) crisis in the years to come. It is for this reason that Boutros-Ghali was sharply critical of the initial redeployment of U.S. troops back to the U.S., leading to countercharges by some within the U.S. policymaking establishment that the UN was dragging its feet in assuming its rightful primary responsibility for the political reconstruction of Somalia.

Far from being resolved as the Bush administration left office on January 20, 1993, the Somali crisis presented the newly inaugurated Clinton administration with the difficult task of reviewing Operation Restore Hope and determining when and how the U.S. should completely disengage from Somalia. According to Robert B. Oakley, former ambassador to Somalia who returned to the country to aid in the coordination of Operation Restore Hope, disengagement neither will be as easy nor as quickly attained as originally envisioned by the Bush White House. Oakley projected the necessity of maintaining a long-term presence of 20,000 UN troops, including approximately 2,000 U.S. combat troops who would be held in reserve in case they were needed. Oakley also recommended the long-term stationing of between 5,000 to 8,000 U.S. logistical troops. Although Oakley cautioned that

37. See, for example, Update Section, "U.S. Commits Force to Somalia, But For How Long?" Africa Report vol. 38, no. 1 (January-February 1993), pp. 5-6, 11.
the U.S. is not likely to play a central role in non-military matters, he nonetheless acknowledged that the U.S. "cannot stand aloof" from aiding in the restoration of governance in Somalia.39

U.S. public opinion constitutes an important (and potentially problematical) aspect of any continuing U.S. military presence. Specifically, as the media increasingly ignores the U.S. military operation in favor of other, more pressing topics, such as the budget deficit and the escalating conflict in former Yugoslavia, the Clinton administration may find itself hard-pressed to maintain popular interest in, and support for, even the sharply reduced U.S. military presence called for by Ambassador Oakley. Most important, if past events are to serve as a guidepost to the future, one can expect that the inevitable decline in popular interest for Operation Restore Hope almost guarantees that Somalia increasingly will be ignored by President Clinton, and that policy—including the proper means for resolving the conflict—increasingly will be left to the Africa specialists within the national security bureaucracies.

Djibouti: Defereence to France Amidst the Intensification of Ethnic Conflict

Unlike its more proactive stances in Ethiopia or Somalia, Washington's low-key response to the intensification of civil conflict in Djibouti continues to be shaped by a desire to defer to French initiatives in its former colony.40 Specifically, France has sought to mediate a growing, ethnically based conflict between the Issa-dominated regime of Hassan Gouled Aptidon, and a variety of opposition forces, most notably the Afar-based military grouping known as the Front pour le Restauration de l'Unité et la Démocratie (FRUD).

Ethnically based conflict in Djibouti reached a turning point in November 1991 when the FRUD launched a sustained military offensive that eventually captured all the major areas in the northern portion of the country, except for the towns of Obock and Tadjoura. Although the Gouled regime ultimately responded by setting in motion a reform process complete with the holding of the country's first multiparty legislative elections in December 1992, critics responded that President Gouled was incapable of doing any more than "patching up" a "dictatorial and tribal-based regime."41 As a result, the FRUD and other opposition groups refused to take part in the electoral process, leading to victory for Gouled's ruling party (le Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progres—RPP) which captured all sixty-five legislative seats with over 70

40. The analysis in this section is derived from Peter J. Schraeder, "Ethnic Politics in Djibouti: From 'Eye of the Hurricane' to 'Boiling Cauldron'," African Affairs (forthcoming 1993).
percent of the vote. The elections were subsequently followed by the intensification of fighting between guerrilla groups and the Djiboutian Armed Forces.

The lack of widespread participation in the electoral process established by the Gouled regime and the continuation of an ethnically based guerrilla insurgency suggest that Djiboutian politics may become increasingly polarized during 1993. Four foreign policy scenarios outline some of the possibilities for future ethnic conflict, as well as the nature of French and, to a lesser degree, U.S. involvement:

(1) **Status Quo.** The first scenario is based on the assumptions that: the Gouled regime continues to proclaim "victory" in the December 1992 legislative elections; this victory is supported by France and; it is accompanied by a government military offensive designed to militarily defeat and or isolate the FRUD. According to the State Department's Africa Bureau, although this scenario potentially could ensure stability in the short term, it does nothing to resolve the long-term grievances of the Afar ethnic group, and therefore merely postpones yet another eruption of ethnic conflict in the country.42 The obvious wild card in this scenario will be the diplomatic stance of France. If Gouled's meeting with French President François Mitterand on November 3, 1992, provides any indication, it would seem that France is going to err on the side of supporting Gouled as long as he makes some effort at seeking a political compromise with the FRUD.43 However, French support for a protracted military offensive appears highly unlikely, especially in light of growing pressures in Paris (most notably within the French Ministry of Defense) to reduce the French financial commitment to the Gouled regime, as well as the number of French troops currently serving in Djibouti.44

(2) **Regional Hegemon.** A second scenario assumes that France, exasperated over the Gouled regime's intransigence to honestly and effectively deal with political and military opposition movements, begins to reduce its financial and military commitment to Djibouti. As a result, the Gouled regime begins looking for another financial backer (perhaps a regional "hegemon") willing to take France's place as the guarantor of Djiboutian independence.45 Although highly unlikely due to France's desire to maintain access to what is still considered in Paris to be a strategic asset for responding to potential

---

42. Confidential interview.


44. Confidential interview with a French official.


2nd Quarter, 1993
crises in the Middle East, such a scenario cannot be completely ruled out. In fact, U.S. officials, particularly officers associated with the CIA’s Africa Division, have voiced concerns over the possibility of either Libya or Iran emerging as the new benefactor of the Gouled regime.46 These analysts are particularly concerned that, similar to its sponsorship of bases for the training of Islamic fundamentalist “terrorists” in the Sudan, Iran will seek a foothold in Djibouti by making a pact with the Gouled regime.47 In a worst-case scenario, this base is envisioned by U.S. analysts as providing the means for further spreading Islamic fundamentalism throughout northeast Africa.

(3) Somalization. A third scenario assumes that the intensification of hostilities between the government and a growing guerrilla insurgency will lead to the overthrow of the Gouled regime and the complete breakdown of the Djiboutian state. As in the case of Somalia, such a scenario envisions the intensification of ethnic fighting, and perhaps the splitting of Djibouti into two separate, ethnically based countries: an Issa-dominated state that potentially could seek to unite with those Issas currently governed by the secessionist Somaliland Republic, thereby realizing what has been referred to as the “Essayi dream”;48 and an Afar-dominated state that potentially could seek to unite with those Afars currently governed by Ethiopia and the provisional government of Eritrea. Although the creation of such states is highly unlikely given the opposition of regional governments and the improbability that France would stand by and do nothing, events in Somalia (as well as in Liberia) clearly demonstrate that Djibouti could fragment into fiefdoms controlled by local warlords. Indeed, even a very proactive French military stance might not be enough to prevent the fragmentation of the country if conflict between the Gouled regime and the FRUD intensifies to such a degree that it spreads to all areas of the country.

(4) Peaceful Transfer of Power. None of the first three scenarios bodes well for the resolution of ethnic conflict in Djibouti. A fourth solution, based on concerted French efforts to support a peaceful transfer of power, envisions the gradual withdrawal of French aid, coupled with a proactive policy designed to isolate the Djiboutian government, such that the Gouled government turns over power to a transitional regime at the scheduled end of its term of office in 1993 in preparation for national elections. In order to ensure Gouled’s acceptance of such a process, he would be guaranteed immunity from any prosecution for acts undertaken while in office, as well as the right to retain all wealth acquired while serving as president. At this point, a transitional government headed by a leader acceptable to all ethnic

46. Confidential interview.
47. Confidential interview.
groups, such as Mohamed Djama Elabe, former Minister of Health, who is respected by many within the Issa, Afar, and French communities, could assume power for a period of one to two years. This step could be followed by the convening of a "national conference"—a proven vehicle for ensuring the relatively smooth transition to a multiparty system in several African countries—by the transitional government within one month of taking power. Among those invited to take part in such a conference, the primary purpose of which would be to create a constitutional framework achieved by consensus, could be the heads of all the major and minor ethnic groups and political interest groups, inclusive of traditional elders. The viability of this scenario, however, is called into question by the incrementalist nature of French foreign policy which frowns upon such radical changes in policy, and therefore favors the continuation of the status quo.

However, none of these scenarios bodes particularly well for the future of ethnic politics in Djibouti. Most important, despite concerns within the U.S. policymaking establishment, it appears that Washington is going to remain largely uninvolved in the reform process. The guiding principle of the State Department’s Africa Bureau—or that national security bureaucracy which, due to the lack of high-level interest, is de facto responsible for formulating U.S. policy toward Djibouti—consistently has been to maintain what it perceives as a correct, low-profile approach that augments, but does not replace, traditional French interests. Great emphasis is placed on consultation with the French, so as to avoid actions that might appear to be undermining their influence. In short, continuity in policy remains the norm despite the end of the Cold War. It is for these reasons that Washington has remained largely silent about continued French support for the Gouled regime in the aftermath of rigged legislative elections in December 1992, despite the fact that many international observers—including members of the State Department’s Africa Bureau—favor some form of option no. 4 outlined above: the gradual withdrawal of French aid, coupled with a proactive policy designed to isolate the Djiboutian government, such that President Gouled turns over power to a transitional regime in preparation for truly democratic national elections.

The Sudan and Fears of Islamic Fundamentalism

In sharp contrast to the low-key U.S. response to events in Djibouti, the Sudan has become the target of increasingly strident rhetoric by various portions of the U.S. policymaking establishment, most notably the House Subcommittee on Africa and the State Department’s Africa Bureau. Specifically, the end of the Cold War has intensified a growing perception within the U.S. policymaking establishment that Islamic fundamentalist regimes constitute threats to U.S. interests on the African continent, including
in the Horn of Africa. Many officials privately note, for example, that the decline and fragmentation of the Soviet Union and communism have created a power vacuum in the Horn of Africa that easily could be filled by "radical" forms of Islamic fundamentalism, such as the "shia" variant espoused by Iran. In a statement indicative of this growing concern, a senior-level Bush administration official noted that the "march of Islamic fundamentalism" was "the single most worrisome trend for policymakers."  

The growing concern with Islamic fundamentalism—exacerbated by public disclosures that the World Trade Center bombing in New York City in 1993 was carried out by individuals associated with "radical" fundamentalist groups in Egypt—was clearly demonstrated by U.S. foreign policy toward the Sudan at the beginning of 1992. A close ally of the United States during the 1980s, Sudanese President Ja’faar al-Nimeiri was overthrown in a 1986 military coup d'état, an event leading to the intensification of a guerrilla war in the southern portion of the country led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), and another successful military coup led by General Omar Hassan al-Bashir in 1989. Bashir’s regime is buttressed by the strong support of the National Islamic Front (NIF), an extremely well-organized and vocal fundamentalist group led by Dr. Hassan al-Turabi. The Sudanese military regime earned the strong denunciations of the Bush administration due to Bashir’s strict enforcement of sharia (Islamic law) and, most important, his apparent decision to allow for the creation of Iranian-sponsored bases that CIA analysts claim are designed to train Islamic militants for "terrorist" actions throughout Africa. Raymond W. Copson, a researcher for the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service, explains that "by January 1992, U.S. officials were telling reporters that Sudan might become a base for exporting Islamic revolution across Africa...although some nongovernment specialists doubted that troubled Sudan would prove very useful to the fundamentalist cause over the long term."

U.S. policymakers are not alone in their denunciations of perceived Iranian-Sudanese cooperation in sponsoring destabilization throughout northeast Africa. For example, Egyptian officials have accused the Sudan of training approximately 2,500 members of the Islamic Group, a militant underground organization seeking the overthrow of the pro-U.S. Egyptian


52. Confidential interview.

regime of President Hosni Mubarak. The Sudan has also been accused of financing two Somali movements—the Islamic Front and the Islamic Union Party—seeking to promote an Islamic alternative to the previously secular and clan-based governments that held power in Somalia from 1960 to the overthrow of the Siad regime in January 1991. As far as U.S. officials are concerned, suspicions were intensified by the signing in December of 1991 of a mutual defense pact between Iran and the Sudan. This was accompanied by the dispatch to Khartoum during that same month from Robert G. Houdek, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, "to warn the Bashir regime that there would be 'grave consequences' if terrorist activity could be traced back to the Sudan."55

U.S.-Sudanese relations became especially strained in the aftermath of an incident in the southern town of Juba in which Andrew Tombe and Aboudoin Talle, two Sudanese employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), were executed by the Sudanese government in September 1992. According to Sudanese officials, the executions were carried out in the aftermath of a ruling by a military tribunal that the two employees had utilized a USAID radio to direct shelling by the insurgent SPLA forces. And, in what one analyst regarded as "an astonishing insult" to the U.S. government, the Sudan's Embassy in London announced that it had "given the U.S. government the benefit of the doubt, assuming that it did not have any knowledge of its employee's illegal activities nor condoned them."56 Despite official protests by the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, including a statement by the State Department that the Bashir regime should be condemned for its "clear violation of international legal standards," both of the accused were executed.57

U.S. foreign policy toward the Sudan is not unique. Rather, it is indicative of a general foreign policy trend in which the anti-communist logic of containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era may be in the process of being replaced by an anti-Islamic variant focused specifically on the variety of fundamentalist regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Equally important, official opposition to Islamic fundamentalism lies at the root of a growing tension during the post-Cold War era between Washington's often-stated preference for democracy in Africa and perceived national security interests. For example, when during the Cold War era the

54. The discussion in this paragraph is drawn from Volman, "Africa and the New World Order," p. 28.
55. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
ideal of promoting democracy clashed with the national security objective of containing communism, containment prevailed at the expense of democracy. It is for this reason that a succession of U.S. administrations were willing to downplay the internal shortcomings of a variety of allies on the African continent—such as Somalia’s Siad, Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko, and a host of Afrikaner regimes in South Africa—in favor of their strong support for U.S. containment policies in Africa.

Although expectations initially were high among U.S. policy analysts and academics that Washington could focus on the normative goal of promoting democracy and human rights in the emerging post-Cold War international system, the U.S. response to events in Algeria in 1991 seemed to indicate that containment of Islamic fundamentalism had replaced anticommunism as at least one security objective that overrode preferences for democratization. In sharp contrast to rising U.S. denunciations of authoritarianism in other regions of Africa, the policymaking establishment remained surprisingly silent when the Algerian army annulled the first multiparty elections in Algeria since independence and assumed control of the country in a military coup d’état. The reason for U.S. silence was not a firm belief in the Algerian generals as guarantors of democracy, but rather was due to the fact that an Islamic fundamentalist party—the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)—was on the verge of taking power through the ballot box.58

Toward the Future: Fashioning a Coherent Foreign Policy Strategy

The end of the Cold War has not led to a coherent U.S. policy toward the Horn of Africa in which the various portions of the U.S. policymaking establishment are equally proactive in pursuing agreed upon goals, such as the promotion of multiparty democracy and adherence to internationally accepted standards of human rights. Rather, the end of the Cold War has contributed to a series of disjointed policies that are unevenly applied on an ad hoc basis. As concerns the issue of promoting multiparty democracy, for example, U.S. diplomacy—apart from rhetorical support—has been very uneven: a willingness to accept flawed elections in Ethiopia is countered by an unwillingness to become deeply involved in political reconstruction in Somalia. In the case of Djibouti, deference to France has led to silence concerning flawed elections in that country. Finally, fears of Islamic fundamentalism in the Sudan seemingly are beginning to override all other foreign policy concerns.

This should not imply, however, that all U.S. foreign policy initiatives in the Horn of Africa have been counterproductive. Indeed, U.S. diplomacy in

Ethiopia clearly aided in the establishment of a political process that avoided the bloodshed still evident in Somalia during the first half of 1993. Additionally, Operation Restore Hope clearly was successful in preventing the further deterioration of famine conditions that surely would have led to the deaths of even greater numbers of Somalis, especially children. Yet these successes do not obscure the fact that Washington needs to fashion a coherent foreign policy strategy that is consistently (and without exception) applied not only among the countries of the Horn of Africa, but throughout the African continent as well. The end of the Cold War has presented Washington with a tremendous opportunity to truly promote multiparty democracy and adherence to human rights standards free from the ideological baggage of East-West competition, and only time will tell if the Clinton administration, unlike its predecessors, is capable of seizing that opportunity.59