

***The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War: Between Ideology and Pragmatism.*** By Radoslav R. Yordanov. The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2016. xxxi, 291 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Maps. \$49.99, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.134

In recent years, research on the multiple dimensions of the relationship between socialist countries and the so-called Third World during the Cold War has gained considerable momentum. While covering different aspects from student exchange programs to economic cooperation, the bulk of contributions explore both contradictions as well as the interplay between Third World and socialist agendas in the sphere of international relations. In this field, Odd Arne Westad's seminal study about the "Global Cold War" and its "interventions in the Third World" set an early benchmark.

Radoslav Yordanov's study takes this debate up. He conceptualizes it as an "international history" of "Moscow's Cold War involvement in the Horn" and meticulously documents its stages since the 1940s (xviii). Interconnected dynamics of Cold War contention and postcolonial determination of position provided a complex framework for these developments. To weigh relevant pushing and pulling factors, Yordanov pays due attention to the international, regional, and domestic constraints of Moscow, Addis Ababa, and Mogadishu alike. Consequently, he organizes his argumentation at least partially along African concerns. In this general context, African elites' rankings of development politics, national visions and prestige, or domestic and regional stability, as well as their reading of international options continuously produced specific opportunities or challenges for the Soviet Union, its allies, and its adversaries. These multiple contexts and perspectives notwithstanding, Yordanov's main interest is in the corresponding Soviet decision-making processes. In part, this focus may also result from pragmatic considerations. Indeed, Yordanov went through a vast range of archives in eastern Europe, Great Britain, and the United States, and unearthed considerable amounts of hitherto unused or formerly inaccessible materials. But, for whatever reasons, it still seems to be especially difficult to provide first-hand evidence from African contemporary primary records.

The author combines his archival discoveries with a broad collection of partly well-known, partly remote memoirs, articles, press reports, and academic literature to devise a dense description of crucial Soviet driving forces. He once again explores the almost classic question of the balance between ideological and realpolitik considerations in Moscow's foreign policy. Traditional markers like "Cominternist" versus "Narkomindel lines" run the danger of overestimating alleged contradictions or incompatibilities between these components (xxv). However, by combining the analytical distinction with a close look at convictions or latitudes of individual as well as constitutional actors not only in Moscow, but in Africa as well, the discussion gains meaningful dimensionality. In addition, the study raises the question of Soviet cooperation with east European socialists in the Horn. One still needs more detailed work on east European perspectives to determine the extent and logics of common activities. The intensification of foreign

trade and international economic relations constituted an integral part of Comecon's efforts to strengthen socialist economies as well as international positions. Nevertheless, slogans about the allegedly amicable socialist cooperation could not conceal inter-socialist competition and contradictions alike. Therefore, east European advances to Third World countries did not always necessarily constitute an integral pillar of Moscow-guided strategies.

Yordanov starts his analysis by recapitulating pre-1960 relations between the Soviet Union and the region. Future Somali-Ethiopian contentious issues, as well as their possible influence on Soviet contacts with the local powers, became already visible before 1960, as did interconnections between global and regional constellations. Thus, early Soviet demands for Eritrean independence were motivated by anti-British calculations. Nevertheless, they ran counter to Ethiopian regional designs and additionally encouraged Haile Selassie to play Cold War warriors off against each other. In the following years, increasing domestic opposition against the Emperor's foreign and domestic policies, as well as Somali independence in 1960, complicated the multipolar relations, particularly since dreams of a Greater Somalia threatened Ethiopian territorial interests. Furthermore, Arab support for Eritrean secessionist forces complicated the situation. In Moscow, Arab activities raised concerns about independent Arab plans, while Addis Ababa considered them to reflect Soviet anti-Ethiopian designs.

Analyses of Soviet activities at that time should bear in mind that the Moscow leadership had little experience in dealing with contemporary Africa. In this period, Soviet observers seemed to perceive new possibilities in post-colonial Africa, but first had to develop appropriate knowledge, apparatuses, experts, instruments, and strategies. In doing so, Moscow soon had to pay special attention to emerging Chinese challenges in the region. In the inter-socialist competition, Moscow could win by military means. In the final analysis, the Somali-Soviet military agreement fueled regional conflicts, but could not transform Soviet feelers and contacts into decisive influence. Overall, Moscow stuck to its idea of balancing parallel relations with both countries in the Horn.

After Siad Barre's successful coup d'état in 1969, considering new Soviet naval ambitions and Anwar Sadat's changing of Middle East alignments, the Horn gained new importance. The description of the turbulent 1970s constitutes one of the book's strengths. From the point of view of Soviet decision-makers, Barre's left credentials were dubious. This and his multipolar foreign policy made him a problematic ally, the advantages of the naval base in Berbera notwithstanding (107). At the same time, Soviet observers registered with interest Ethiopia's shift to the left. Ambitious Mengistu Haile Mariam seemed to be the right person to steer Addis Ababa towards socialist reconstruction. Ethiopian territorial integrity was considered to constitute a *sine qua non* for continuing so-called progressive politics. Soviet representatives in the Horn did their best to educate Moscow accordingly. In addition, Fidel Castro contributed his African expertise. He concluded from a fact-finding mission in 1977 that only in Ethiopia was a "true African Bolshevik revolution" taking place (164). The Soviet balancing act between Somalia and Ethiopia became finally impossible, when Barre invaded the Ogaden in July

1977. The book delivers a fascinating reconstruction of the crucial culminations and reversals in the Horn during the following months.

Once the dust had settled, it became obvious that the USSR had not developed clear strategies for future exploitation of its new standing in Addis Ababa. Insider Karen Brutents went so far as to state that corresponding Washington anxieties simply accorded Soviet “state leadership greater intellectual capacity than it possessed” (206). Nevertheless, Soviet and Cuban engagement in the Horn significantly contributed to the Second Cold War. A victorious Mengistu furthermore proved to be an extremely inconvenient partner. His dictatorial regime did not fulfil socialist expectations, but became an additional economic and prestige burden. The description of this long-lasting aftermath vividly demonstrates all the possible pitfalls and inconsistencies of Soviet-Third World relations. Gorbachev’s new international thinking consequently downgraded Soviet efforts. The end of the global cold war finally cut Ethiopia’s as well as Somalia’s “superpower life-support systems” (240). Although a disappointed Mengistu swiftly abandoned socialist programs and slogans, he could not save his power—he left Ethiopia in May 1991, only a few months after Barre’s fall from power in Somalia.

Westad in his aforementioned analysis discussed in some detail Soviet activities in the Horn in the 1970s. His findings provide a reasonable yardstick for the discussion of Yordanov’s book-length account. In fact, their main interpretations of Moscow’s radical reversal of alliances in an area marked by both strategic importance and regional disruption do not substantially differ. Independent of this core consensus, Yordanov’s book adds a lot of telling details and dimensions. Unfortunately, some unnecessary inaccuracies tend to distort the given values: In 1955, Ivan Majskij was not ambassador in London (12), but hoped to regain a certain standing after his Gulag-imprisonment under Stalin. As a result, his assessment of socialist chances in the colonial world is comparatively weak evidence for Khrushchev’s Third World policy. The “Centre” is no exclusive synonym for the KGB central headquarters, which affects the reconstruction of relevant flows of information from Africa to Moscow. In 1961, Anastas Mikoyan acted as political heavyweight and not as Soviet deputy foreign minister (36).

Such shortcomings notwithstanding, the broadening of our perspective constitutes the most important plus of Yordanov’s intensive research. By embedding the dramatic culmination in a multi-perspective analysis of its pre-history and long-term impacts on Soviet-east African relations, the study enriches our understanding of the twisted development of Soviet Third World politics under changing international and domestic conditions. The chosen *longue durée* approach has its benefits, since the dynamic shifting and reshifting of balances between continuous, overarching undercurrents on the one hand and immediate concerns, considerations, or possibilities on the other become even more visible. In this way, the extended outlook helps to distinguish more precisely different layers of primary or secondary factors in often-twisted decision-making processes. Correspondingly, it reveals more accurately the multifaceted, even occasionally fissured relief of the resulting concrete decisions. By underlining the varying shades and subtle distinctions that marked Soviet approaches toward single Third World countries and

societies at different times, this book highlights the importance of concrete case studies and warns against premature generalizations concerning Soviet strategies. The study thus adds decisively to our understanding of the complex “linkage-burdened international agenda and the competition for attention from local actors,” that resulted in the complex, costly, and sometimes bizarre Soviet position in the Horn of Africa (257).

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