

SOMALIA -- HORN OF AFRICA

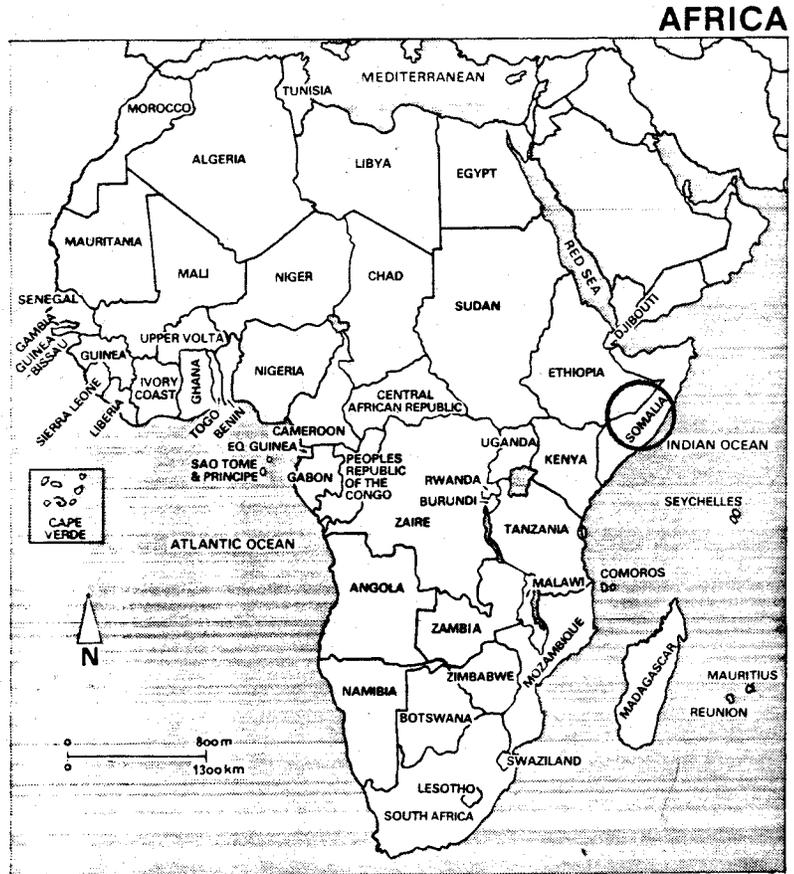
[Editor's Note: The following precis was prepared by Captain Craig L. Smith, USA, Director of the African Studies Seminar at DISAM. The precis provides useful historical data as a background to the subsequent cover feature story on U.S. security assistance activities in Somalia.]

The Somalis, known as the "Black Berbers," can be traced back thousands of years -- to the very beginning of history in the Horn of Africa. As early as 1500 B.C., the port of Mogadishu was known to the Egyptians. Trade routes from Mogadishu were also established to Thailand, China, and Phoenicia, as well as to the pre-Muslim Arabian peninsula kingdoms.

Somalia embraced Islam from Saudi Arabia by way of the Gulf of Aden in the 7th century. The city of Zeila in extreme northwestern Somalia was later recognized as a true center of Islam. Somali links to Islam remain profound.

Geopolitical and colonial concerns about Somalia began to arise in the 19th century when the Sultanate of Oman took control of southern Somalia; during the same period, Britain established a base in Aden and later, in 1927, proclaimed a protectorate over northern Somalia. The French, for their part, occupied and controlled the port of Djibouti in 1888. Meanwhile, the Omani-Zanzibari dynasty, which had occupied Mogadishu in 1871, sold southern Somalia (including Mogadishu) to Italy in 1889, and Italy then occupied southern Somalia in 1898.

The first major rebellion against colonial rule began in 1899 in the southeastern, or coastal, corner of the British Protectorate, and was led by Mohamad Abdille Hassan, the infamous "Mad Mullah of Somaliland" who is still a celebrated national figure. This resistance/nationalist campaign lasted until the



Mullah's death in 1921, when the movement collapsed under pressure from joint Ethiopian, British, and Italian troops, as well as a smallpox epidemic.

During the Italo-Ethiopian war, which began in 1935, Italy overran Ethiopia, and by 1940 had occupied the Somali Protectorate. This placed all Somalis, except those in northern Kenya and Djibouti, under one administration. After the defeat of the Italians in 1941-42, the British continued this administrative pattern for several years. In 1950, the United Nations granted Italy its former Somali colony to administer as a trusteeship in preparation for independence.

In 1960, the British and Italian territories in Somali became independent within five days of each other. After reunification, however, no recognized legal border separating Somali from the Ogaden region in Ethiopia was established, and none was recognized by either the Somali Democratic Republic (SDR) or Ethiopia. To date, a "provisional administrative line" remains all that exists between the Ogaden and Somalia. The lack of a recognized border between the two is a major factor in the present tension between Somalia and Ethiopia.

The first multi-party governments for the SDR were characterized by successively increasing levels of corruption and inefficiency. Major General Mohammed Siyad Barre gained power in a bloodless coup d'etat on 21 October 1969. General Barre established a government centralized under a "Supreme Revolutionary Council" which followed a socialist path for governing; and a single, state-sponsored political party, the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party, was established.

During this period of socialist orientation (1970-1977) Somali turned to the Soviets for aid and advice. The tension between the Somali ambition to reunify the Somali lands, and increased Soviet interest in expanding its influence in the region through Ethiopia seemed to come to a head in 1974 when Somalia joined the Arab league. This new political alignment was followed in 1977 by substantial Soviet arms supplies to Ethiopia, and resulted in a dramatic change in political affiliation: Ethiopia became a Soviet client state, and Somalia, having turned away from the Soviet Union, increased its relationships with Western countries.

Massive military assistance to Ethiopia from Soviet and Cuban forces, coupled with cutbacks in aid to Ethiopia during the Carter Administration due to human rights concerns, resulted in both an Ethiopian reoccupation of the Ogaden and U.S. alignment with Somalia. These events have led to heightened guerrilla warfare in the region, with more than a half million refugees in Somali camps and at least as many again roaming around the countryside. One person in four in Somalia is today a refugee. Severe prolonged drought in the region has further aggravated personal suffering.

The January 1979 Somali constitution, passed by near unanimity, has the aim of returning the country to Parliamentary rule by establishing a People's Assembly. In January 1980, President Barre was unanimously re-elected by the People's Assembly for another six-year term.

