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The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War: Between Ideology and Pragmatism (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series)

Radoslav A. Yordanov

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At the height of the Cold War, Soviet ideologues, policymakers, diplomats, and military officers perceived the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America as the future reserve of socialism, holding the key to victory over Western forces. The zero-sum nature of East-West global competition induced the United States to try to thwart Soviet ambitions. The result was predictable: the two superpowers engaged in proxy struggles against each other in faraway, little-understood lands, often ending up entangled in protracted and highly destructive local fights that did little to serve their own agendas.
Using a wealth of recently declassified sources, this book tells the complex story of Soviet involvement in the Horn of Africa, a narrowly defined geographic entity torn by the rivalry of two large countries (Ethiopia and Somalia), from the beginning of the Cold War until the demise of the Soviet Union. At different points in the twentieth century, this region—arguably one of the poorest in the world—attracted broad international interest and large quantities of advanced weaponry, making it a Cold War flashpoint. The external actors ultimately failed to achieve what they wanted from the local conflicts—a lesson relevant for U.S. policymakers today as they ponder whether to use force abroad in the wake of the unhappy experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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