

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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July 31, 1978

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

- The Vice President
- The Secretary of State
- The Secretary of Defense
- The Director, Office of Management and Budget
- The U.S. Representative to the UN
- The Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
- The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
- The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Intelligence Assessment for the PRC Meeting July 31, 1978

Attached is the Intelligence Assessment for the PRC Meeting which will be held today.

Christine Dodson
Christine Dodson
Staff Secretary

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Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: FEB 29 2016

CIA

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Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
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27 July 1978

ASPECTS OF THE ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI SITUATION

Introduction

This assessment has been drafted by the NIO/AF following consultation with a group of working-level analysts and specialists in the intelligence community. It responds to questions put by the Africa Bureau of the Department of State in preparation for a review of US policy regarding arms transfers to Somalia.

Who is Fighting in the Ogaden?

The guerrilla warfare in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia is being carried on by ethnic Somalis and other indigenous irregulars supported by cadre and advisors from the regular Somali army.

The total number of irregulars who are available for armed action is not known, but we estimate it to be in the range of 15 to 20,000. The character of the warfare makes it impossible to estimate how many of these are actively engaged at any one time, and our figure includes guerrillas who cross back and forth over the border. This figure is substantially higher than the number of irregulars we estimated a year ago or even six months ago; the increase is due both to new information raising the size of the guerrilla forces and to re-evaluation of who and what a guerrilla is, in this situation.

Our estimate of the Ethiopian force opposing the guerrillas in the same region is much firmer -- 75-80,000 (of which 15-17,000 are south of Jijiga in the Ogaden, and 22,000 in Bale-Sidamo) plus 8,000 Cubans (all currently located in the Jijiga, Harar, Dire Dawa area).

Somali Support

The Somali army's support apparatus for the guerrillas was re-established in April 1978 along lines very close to those which had been developed in the period prior to early summer 1977, when the then guerrilla forces were subordinated to the Somali army. Two groups of Somali regular military personnel are involved:

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-- Inside Somalia, Somali officers and enlisted personnel who have been assigned to a central unit responsible for the overall support and coordination of the guerrilla effort. We do not know the size of this group, but we believe that 500 is a conservative estimate. It is top-heavy with officers, as it should be given its function.

-- Inside Ethiopia, Somali officers and enlisted men seconded as field advisors to guerrilla units. We have no estimate of the number of such personnel.

These support elements are in addition to those elements of the Somali military establishment inside Somalia whose duties include activities which support the guerrilla effort. This last category includes two commando battalions reported to be in training this month (July) to provide more experienced personnel to the guerrilla effort.

Trends in Somali Involvement in Support Activity

We have seen neither an expansion nor contraction of the Somali support structure, or of the numbers of personnel involved, since the apparatus was re-established in April.

The level of guerrilla operational activity has fluctuated since April. As reflected in intelligence, peak for this activity so far was about mid-June. Three months is, of course, a relatively short period, and while we have no evidence that specifically correlates this fluctuation with any other developments, we believe that it most likely stems from the tactical military situation, particularly a shift in tactics by the Ethiopians from relatively open and lightly guarded movements of supply columns through guerrilla-held countryside to more cautious and heavily armed convoys which provide more difficult and less frequent targets for guerrilla attack.

Siad's Position

We have seen no evidence (other than some of his own statements) that suggests to us any attempt by President Siad to limit Somali government support for the guerrillas during this period or to restrict guerrilla operations for political reasons. There is evidence that Siad is seeking, through personnel shifts and structural changes, to tighten his control over the guerrillas, but this has characterized his political actions generally since the defeat of the Somali army in the Ogaden last winter.

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There are also signs that Siad is continuing to solicit foreign support for the guerrillas, even while the guerrillas complain that he has stood in the way of their receiving such support directly. We believe that Egypt, and possibly China, are responding to Siad's approaches. It is extremely difficult, however, to distinguish foreign arms transfers to the Ogaden guerrillas from materiel arriving for Somalia's own use, although mines and anti-tank rockets, neither of which are produced in Somalia, evidently are being used by the guerrillas along with small arms.

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If Siad chose to "turn off the valve," to cut off supplies from the guerrillas and remove Somali personnel now supporting them, we believe there would be a gradual, rather than immediate or total, cessation of guerrilla activity. He is not in a position to order such a cessation, even for a short period, unless the guerrillas could be persuaded that clear and substantial benefits to their cause were immediately at hand. Moreover, the benefits he promised would have to materialize almost at once if his order were to continue to be obeyed.

As we see his situation, however, Siad is impelled to continue to support the guerrillas by several considerations aside from his personal inclinations:

-- his generally less assured position in the wake of military defeat, which requires him to demonstrate that his leadership is not failing and that he is still actively pursuing a policy to which virtually all Somalis subscribe.

-- his need to defend himself from the charge that he mismanaged the campaign against Ethiopia and that his political strategy is a failure; sentiment along these lines appears to center in elements of the Somali army, which are restive on other grounds as well, notably his turning to his own clan in his domestic appointments.

-- his continued need for economic support from abroad, which he justifies on the ground that he is still in the field against the Soviets and their Ethiopian tools; this is an argument he uses especially with conservative Arabs, although the interest of the Saudis and others in the Ogaden itself has never been overwhelming.

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There are other constraints on Ethiopian action against Somalia. One certainly is the campaign in Eritrea, to which the Ethiopians' best forces are devoted and from which they could not be diverted without substantial costs. Another is the military posture of the Somalis in northern Somalia. While Ethiopian reconnaissance is reported to have found the road to Margeisa wide open, and in a narrow sense this is likely accurate, our information is that the Somalis are working hard to reorganize their forces in the northern sector and that there are now significant defensive elements on the northern flank of what would be the Ethiopian axis of advance.

Despite Ethiopian warnings, we do not believe that the arrival of a US military survey team in Somalia or the announcement of an arms transfer agreement would bring a break in US-Ethiopian diplomatic relations. To some extent, recent press publicity re Ethiopian protests has made a stronger reaction more necessary psychologically, and some further limitation of the size of the US mission in Addis Ababa would be a strong possibility, particularly following an announcement of an agreement.

Kenyan Reactions

We believe the Kenyans have made their point about arms transfers to Somalia, and that the recent visit of the US survey team will mute their objections, even though they certainly have not changed their views of Siad or of Somalia's ultimate designs on Kenyan territory, and might use this development as an argument for additional help from the US.

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Closing the valve would thus be a major shift in policy which would put Siad in jeopardy, and this jeopardy would increase if he did not come up with some countervailing success of a striking kind. He is, however, a tough and wily operator, and he is taking steps to insulate himself from hostile elements inside and outside Somalia. He should not be counted out easily, whatever his difficulties.

If Siad fails to establish an arms supply relationship with the US, we believe he would not, by this development alone, be placed in jeopardy beyond where he is now, primarily because the Somali military do not have great expectations for the American connection. Siad's position would be more seriously endangered if he became unable to obtain substantial supplies of arms from any non-Soviet source -- Western, Arab, or private commercial. He is not yet in this situation, although he apparently is having to search farther afield for particular items.

Intelligence analysts see no specific candidate to replace Siad. On the whole, we doubt that any replacement would pursue a significantly different course in foreign relations, nor in regard to the Ogaden guerrillas. While we foresee that over time, and with some movement toward cooling the problems of the Horn generally, there should be some normalization of Somalia's relations with the USSR, we think a lurch to the left is unlikely as a result of a failure to obtain arms from the US. Moreover, there are no indications that the USSR is interested in modifying its policy to permit such a development at this time.

Ethiopian Reactions

If, as we expect, the guerrilla campaign in the Ogaden persists and continues to have Somali support, we believe the Ethiopians will be led to attempt to retaliate by military action on the ground as well as by an expanded air effort. While Soviet, and therefore in this instance Cuban, policy is a constraint on Ethiopian retaliatory action, we doubt that the Soviets can argue against a ground attack indefinitely, and we do not believe they would object strongly in any event to an operation in which a force hit guerrilla camps inside Somalia and then pulled out promptly. Cuban combatants would be unlikely to accompany the Ethiopians across the border but would probably be willing to support such an operation indirectly from Ethiopian territory. The Northern Somalia Liberation Front is also available to the Ethiopians, but we have no reading on how effective it would be.

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