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Somalia: Status of the Armed Forces

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An Intelligence Memorandum

DIA review
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ALA 82-10036
March 1982

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Somalia: Status of the Armed Forces

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An Intelligence Memorandum

*Information available as of 2 March 1982
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted]

[Redacted] Office of African and Latin American Analysis.

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, West and East Africa Division,
ALA, [Redacted]

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This report has been coordinated with the National
Intelligence Officer for Africa and the Directorate
of Operations. [Redacted]

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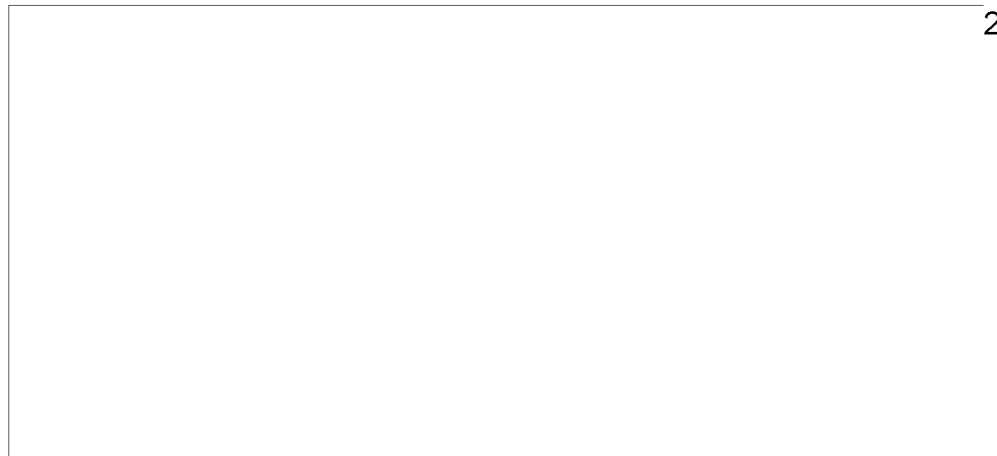
Somalia: Status of
the Armed Forces



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Summary

Since Somali President Siad signed the military access agreement with the United States in 1980, he has attempted to become more closely identified with the United States and has counted on Washington and its allies to rebuild his country's weak and disorganized military.



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A substantial increase in military aid to Somalia by the United States and its allies would strengthen Siad's domestic position temporarily, but it also would carry a number of risks. A Somalia with a revitalized military would probably expand its support to insurgents in Ethiopia's Ogaden Region and would be tempted to reinsert regular combat forces there to disrupt Ethiopian and dissident Somali operations. The United States and its allies would then find themselves open to charges of abetting Somali irredentism. An improvement in Somalia's military capabilities would be especially upsetting to Kenya, which remains an object of Somali irredentism and also has a military access agreement with the United States.



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The Military's
Predicament

The deficiencies in Somalia's armed forces significantly reduce its ability to respond to any concerted Ethiopian ground attack or air activity, and to raids by anti-Siad Somali dissidents. Ethiopian-supported insurgent operations, for example, are successful because the Somali military lacks a quick response capability and has little experience in counter guerrilla fighting.

[Redacted]

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According to the US defense attache in Mogadishu, Somalia's acquisition of non-Soviet equipment has compounded its predicament. British tanks, Italian armored personnel carriers and aircraft, and Chinese fighter-bombers have placed additional burdens on Somalia's maintenance personnel and its inefficient logistical network. In addition, many of these weapons are old and spare parts for them are costly and difficult to obtain.

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The Threat to Somalia

Ethiopia and Libya are the main external threats to Somalia, although their motives for wanting to overthrow the Siad regime differ. Ethiopian leader Mengistu wants to blunt Somalia's irredentist threat. He also is seeking revenge for Somalia's 1977-78 invasion of Ethiopia and Mogadishu's continued support to guerrillas in the Ogaden Region. Qadhafi, on the other hand, resents Siad's support for the Camp David Accords, his close ties with Egypt, and Mogadishu's granting the United States access to its air and naval facilities. [redacted]

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Addis Ababa and Mogadishu are engaged in a longstanding conflict for control of the areas of eastern Ethiopia inhabited by ethnic Somalis. Since independence in 1960, Somalia has consistently assisted insurgent operations in the region, and the two countries have clashed in two wars and numerous border incidents. [redacted]

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Implications for the
United States

US interest in Somalia is based on the agreement signed in 1980 permitting the United States access to Somali air and naval facilities. Siad will continue his attempts to build on that US interest, to become closely identified with the United States, and to make Somalia more important to Washington's defense plans in the region. Siad will use his ties to the United States and his general support for Western policies to appeal for significant military assistance. [redacted] 25X1

The basic problems that have prevented a more extensive US-Somali arms supply relationship are not likely to change. These include:

- Mogadishu's refusal to renounce its irredentist claims on Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Somalia's continued support to the insurgents operating in Ethiopia's Ogaden Region.
- The massive financial cost of rebuilding Somalia's military capabilities.
- Mogadishu's inability to pay for major arms purchases. [redacted] 25X1

Siad's failure to strengthen the country's military has led to a growing frustration in the armed forces and may be encouraging some coup plotting among senior officers. This will make Somalia a regional ally of questionable stability for the foreseeable future. [redacted]

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some Somali officers believe that the West's refusal to provide more than limited defensive arms stems from a distrust of Siad. Siad's refusal to initiate major economic and political reforms, according to other Somali officials, is the reason. Siad is increasingly seen by these military leaders as the source of Somalia's problems. If the situation in Somalia continues to decline, these factions are likely to move to oust Siad. [redacted] 25X1

A successor regime probably would continue the country's pro-Western policies in the short term. Most Somali military officers support the idea of looking to the United States for help, and the country's perennial hostility toward Ethiopia limits chances for an early rapprochement with Ethiopia's Soviet patron. The new leadership would expect the United States and its allies to be more generous with military aid, however, and if this did not occur the Somali Government over time probably would attempt a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Such a policy shift would jeopardize the US position in Somalia and US access to Somali facilities. [redacted] 25X1

Any substantial increase in Western military aid to Somalia would pose problems for Washington and regional nations. Despite a recent thaw in Kenyan-Somali relations, Nairobi still fears any improvement in Somalia's military capabilities and would press the United States for increased assistance. Nairobi also could threaten to restrict US access to its air and naval facilities in an effort to discourage the United States from rearming Somalia. Ethiopia, for its part, would respond to increased US aid to

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Somalia by moving still closer to the Soviet Union and Cuba. Addis Ababa would probably also increase its efforts to topple Siad before he makes any significant improvement in his military posture. [redacted]

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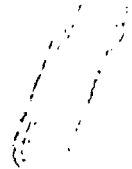
A revitalized Somali military almost certainly would become more aggressive on the Ogaden issue, viewing Western assistance as both a military and political commitment. The military is a major supporter of Somali irredentism, and if it were strengthened would seek once again to support guerrilla operations and use its own regular forces in the Ogaden to keep Ethiopia away from the Somali border. In such a situation the United States and its allies would find themselves open to charges of supporting Somali military adventures in the region. [redacted]

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