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## France Reappraises its Position in the Territory of the Afars and Issas

Paris appears to be assessing its position in the Territory of the Afars and Issas, including the strategically important base at Djibouti, in preparation for a possible acceleration in the territory's move toward independence.

The French reappraisal appears to have been sparked by the increasing pressure for political change among the pro-French Afar majority, along with alleged maneuvering toward independence under French guarantees by Ali Aref, the Afar chief minister of the Territory. France has always maintained that it is prepared to withdraw if the local population desires independence, but only recently have French officials begun to assess what this policy will mean in practice.

Djibouti is the only major French military base left in the Indian Ocean area. By virtue of its location at the mouth of the Red Sea, Djibouti will increase in importance with the reopening of the Suez Canal. France's dependence on Middle East oil supplies makes the entire Indian Ocean area critical for the survival of French industry.

The reopening of the Suez Canal will also mean that the Red Sea route can greatly shorten the logistic support line to French forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. France has shown growing concern that the Indian Ocean not be left in sole control of the US and the USSR. Important as Djibouti is to France, however, Paris will not want to risk another colonial war to maintain the French presence there.

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French officials note that Ali Aref, once considered a French pawn, is becoming a leader with whom Paris will have to reckon. The French are worried that Ali Aref, in an attempt to steal his domestic opponents' thunder, may make a precipitous call for independence in the local assembly where he controls the vote.

Somalia's claim to the Territory--based on the fact that the Issas, who constitute almost one-half of the population of 125,000, are a Somali tribe--complicates the French position. Paris argues that if the French troops pull out before an agreement has been reached, the Territory will become a battleground as Somalia and Ethiopia seek to fill the vacuum.

Somali President Siad, meanwhile, has increased his polemics against the French presence in recent months and Arab and African leaders have also pressed France to "decolonize."

Ethiopia has downplayed its own claim to the French Territory, recognizing that a French withdrawal would increase the risk of a confrontation with Somalia. The Ethiopians are satisfied at present with the arrangement allowing them to use the port of Djibouti.

External pressures have been matched recently by internal tensions. The animosity between the Afars and Issas who live in the Territory erupted last week into bloody clashes, apparently precipitated by an intertribal quarrel. During several days of rioting, about 16 persons were killed and some 250 injured, including 12 French gendarmes. Some opponents of French rule probably tried to incite the crowd to keep the riots going as a means of gaining publicity and embarrassing France prior to the convening of the African Liberation Committee in Rabat and the Arab League in Mogadiscio.

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Election Threat in Sweden Fades

Swedish Prime Minister Palme's threat to call elections achieved its purpose last Friday when the opposition Liberal and Center parties agreed to support the government's economic program. Both Center Party leader Falldin and Liberal Party leader Helen assured Palme that their parties would continue to support the government's fiscal policies.

Palme appears to have issued the warning as a ploy to get the two opposition parties back into the Social Democratic camp on fiscal matters. Despite the renewed assurances of the Liberals and the Center, three of the government's seven pending economic proposals were voted down last Friday by the opposition. Palme is apparently satisfied, however, that future economic cooperation on the main points of the government's economic program has been assured.

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New Evidence of European Socialist Opposition to Franco Regime

Participation by West Germany's highest ranking army officer in the annual military parade in Madrid last week celebrating Franco's victory over Spanish Republican forces has caused a political furor in Bonn and among other European socialists. The affair demonstrates once again the strong opposition to Franco's Spain by many Europeans, even West German social democrats who are well aware of the benefits NATO derives from the bilateral US relationship with Spain.

Lt. General Horst Hildebrandt, Inspector-General of the Army, was the guest of the Spanish Army from May 24-27. During an unscheduled meeting with Franco, he accepted an invitation to attend the annual victory parade.

Among the West Germans, the strongest outcry came from within the ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) and trade unions, where opposition to the Franco regime is traditional. The party's Young Socialists called for Hildebrandt's retirement. Older elements in the party were equally irate. The SPD's parliamentary military expert, Alfons Pawelczyk, termed Hildebrandt's action "incomprehensible," adding that even "simple participation in a parade celebrating victory of a dictatorial regime over a freely elected republic is bound to lead to misinterpretation."

Defense Minister Leber disassociated himself and the Schmidt government from the General's action, pointing out that, while the visit to Spain had been cleared, the general's attendance at the parade had

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not. Although he has acknowledged Hildebrandt's action to have been a mistake and has urged more caution in the future, Leber appears unwilling to censure the General, who ranks as one of West Germany's most effective Army Inspectors-General.

Other western Europe Socialists have also reacted vigorously. On May 29, the Socialist faction in the European Parliament issued a formal protest. Members of the Socialist group privately described the action as "scandalous," an "insult to the victims of the Spanish Civil War," and a "slander" against democracy.

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