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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

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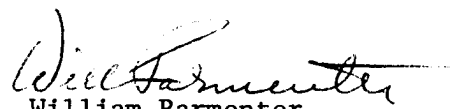
National Intelligence Officers

18 October 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: The National Foreign Intelligence Board

SUBJECT : Interagency Assessment: Somali Military Posture
in the Ogaden

The attached interagency assessment has been coordinated informally at the working level. The paper was prepared to respond to a series of rather specific questions, and thus its scope is a bit narrow. However, we felt that the observations and judgments that surfaced during this undertaking should be shared with others following developments in the Horn of Africa.



William Parmenter
National Intelligence Officer
for Africa

Attachment

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18 October 1977

INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT

SUBJECT: Somali Military Posture in the Ogaden

KEY JUDGMENTS

- Despite Somali denials of direct involvement in the Ogaden fighting, nearly a third of Somalia's regular units have been in the Ogaden at one time or another since late July. These units include commando, tank, motorized, mechanized, and a artillery battalions. About 8,000 to 10,000 insurgents are fighting alongside the Somali regulars.
- Somalia's success in the Ogaden has been due to its ability to keep the pace of the fighting within the range of its limited resources. This includes a strategy of relying as much as possible on insurgents to pin down Ethiopian defenders and husbanding POL and ammunition supplies for a series of almost evenly spaced major attacks. In addition, the Somalis can choose the time and place of the attacks because of Ethiopian inability to put significant pressure on SNA and insurgent forces anywhere in the region.
- The SNA has lost about 40 to 50 tanks since July 23, plus an undetermined number of armored personnel carriers and trucks.
- Despite these losses, we expect Siad to continue the offensive until he has achieved his military objectives of capturing Dire Dawa, Harar, and a few remaining strongholds in the south and establishing a defensive position. We believe that Siad has an even chance of achieving his objectives. If he does not do so by the end of the year, then his prospects become less favorable.

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- Arab military and financial aid should provide Somalia with sufficient small arms, ammunition, and spare parts, but it appears at this time that Siad is unlikely to find an alternative source to replace the major military equipment the Soviets are refusing to supply. Saudi Arabian pressure on Arab and West European countries to be forthcoming to Somali requests is unlikely to achieve results.
- If major items of equipment cannot be obtained and the level of the fighting is significantly increased, the SNA would be hard-pressed to hold on to what it has in the Ogaden, much less continue its advance.
- Ethiopia is determined to mount a counterattack as soon as possible. Transitioning Ethiopian fighter pilots to Soviet aircraft should not be difficult, but training tank crews, mechanics, and other hard-skill specialists will be time consuming. An effective counteroffensive will also be delayed by morale problems, vulnerable supply lines, and other military deficiencies. Nevertheless, some Ethiopian units armed with new Soviet equipment could be ready within six months.
- In the meantime, recent deliveries of new Soviet aircraft should allow the Ethiopians to maintain their air superiority in the Ogaden and possibly conduct strikes into Somalia. If the Dire Dawa airfield is lost, MIG-21s and F-5s operating from Debre Zeit could reach the Dire Dawa - Harar area, and MIG-23s, if received and made operational, could strike targets deep in Somalia.
- In the long run, Ethiopia probably will regain the military advantage because of its superior manpower reserves and acquisition of Soviet military equipment. The USSR and its allies have delivered a sizable number of tanks, some artillery pieces, APCs and MIG-21s, and they have promised additional MIGs, a few missile boats, and surface-to-air missiles.

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5. Equipment Losses and Casualties. We do not believe recent reports that Somali losses have been as high as 70 percent of all tanks and 30 percent of all troops committed. We estimate 40 to 50 Somali tanks have been lost since the 23rd of July, plus an undetermined number of armored personnel carriers and trucks--probably less than 30 percent of the total inventory. Artillery losses are probably much lower, since this equipment is normally deployed a considerable distance behind the front lines. Some small fraction of the SNA losses may have been made up through the use of captured materiel including American-made M-41 and M-47 tanks and a few Soviet T-34 tanks.

6. Data on Somali personnel losses is too unreliable to make a sound judgment; nonetheless, reports indicate about 440 are known dead, 480 wounded, and about 30 captured. Actual figures are almost certain to be higher, but probably not as high as 30 percent of all troops committed.

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7. Logistics. Prior to the beginning of war it was generally believed that logistic and maintenance factors would play a significant part in limiting Somalia's military options. Assistance from friendly Arab regimes has unquestionably relieved some of the anxiety, but the aid received from Soviet and Middle Eastern donors has not entirely resolved the problem. At various times [redacted] operations canceled or delayed because of shortages of rations and artillery ammunition. [redacted] some of the front line units were reportedly out of mine detection equipment [redacted] were directed to gather up all captured medical supplies and forward them to Mogadiscio. [redacted]

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8. Logistics have played a part in shaping the pattern of Somalia's combat operation. Periods of heavy fighting have typically been preceded by two to three weeks of intensive administrative and logistic preparation. An attacking force sufficient to overwhelm the Ethiopian garrison is assembled, supplies and POL are ordered forward from divisional supply points, and locals sympathetic to the Somali cause are recruited to assist the regular forces in the attack. Several days prior to the attack Somali forces move into their attack positions usually within sight of the Ethiopian defenders. Following two to four days of heavy fighting the cycle is repeated. This pattern of lengthy preparation, followed by a short period of intensive combat, has been feasible because the Ethiopians are not putting any significant pressure on the SNA and insurgent forces anywhere in the Ogaden. The SNA had had enough time to relocate its forces, and juggle its limited logistic resources, to meet the military demands imposed on it by Somalia's political leadership.

9. While we do not have good information on the SNA's logistic reserves or resupply capabilities, we would have to assume, from their current offensive efforts, that sufficient stores are available to maintain the current level or character of the fighting over the short term. However, if the nature of the fighting is significantly increased, and if the Somalis are unable to find foreign sources for major items of equipment,

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the SNA would be hard-pressed to hold on to what they have in the Ogaden, much less continue their advance.

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B. Air Forces

11. Inventory and Deployment. Prior to the fighting in the Ogaden, the Somali Air Force was believed to have had 42 combat aircraft in its inventory normally based at Hargeisa, Uanle Uen, and Ischia Baidoa. During the conflict these aircraft were redeployed to provide improved support for ground forces in the Ogaden.

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12. Operational Capability. Actual aircraft losses are probably higher than our conservative estimate, and the overall fighting capability of the Somali Air Force is believed to be considerably reduced. There is a shortage of fighter pilots, and the capability of existing pilots is questionable. Aircraft maintenance is substandard, and no replacement aircraft appear to be forthcoming. We believe that Somalia has 13 additional Fishbeds yet to be assembled, but the Soviet technicians may not be continuing with this project. Ethiopia will probably continue to enjoy air superiority over most of the Ogaden. However, the loss of the airfield at Dire Dawa would limit Ethiopian combat aircraft capabilities in the Ogaden. Operating from Debre Zeit, MIG-21s and F-5s could reach the Harrar - Dire Dawa area but could not reach targets as far as Hargeisa. However, if Ethiopia obtains MIG-21s, then operating from Debre Zeit they would be able to strike targets deep inside Somalia.

II. SOMALIA'S STAYING POWER

A. Forces Available for Deployment

13. The overall strength of the SNA is presently thought to be about 32,000 men. Subtracting the number of personnel believed to be in the Ogaden (9,000 to 13,000) does not necessarily furnish a reliable estimate of the number of troops still available for deployment. Some SNA personnel are known to have been siphoned off for service with the insurgents, others have undoubtedly been taken out of their usual assignments and sent to the Ogaden as replacements. The 17th Motorized Group, formerly stationed at Chisimaio has functioned primarily as a replacement depot for the various groups already in combat. Various other measures have been taken to augment the forces available for combat operations, including the organization of defense squads in factories, drafting local personnel into the police in areas captured by Somalia, providing weapons training at the local party level, returning to active duty all noncommissioned officers and enlisted personnel on loan to civil agencies, recalling students training abroad, and transferring all recent graduates of the Halane Academy to operational units. Somali officials have also mentioned a 100,000-man reserve, which is apparently being called up to counter the threat posed by the Ethiopian People's Militia, but there are indications that this force

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cannot be adequately equipped with the material available in Somalia.

14. While it is difficult to accurately assess the effectiveness of Somalia's recruiting and retraining programs, no significant increase in the overall strength of the SNA is likely to occur without major outside logistic support. Vacancies in existing units can probably be filled but no additional units are likely to be formed. Thus the armed and trained troops presently in Somalia that could be committed to the fighting probably number about 15,000.

B. Equipment Status

15. Reserves. Somalia's limited equipment reserves are, for the most part, already in the hands of the troops. Those units which have not yet crossed the border or engaged in combat operations constitute the known reserves of both trained manpower and materiel. This situation is particularly critical in the case of combat aircraft, tanks, personnel carriers, and cargo vehicles. Although Somalis has received considerable amounts of military equipment from various nations, there is no indication that any nation has made up the losses in combat vehicles and aircraft.

16. Sources of New Equipment. Since July, the People's Republic of China, Italy, and sympathetic Muslim states have furnished large quantities of military and medical supplies. Soviet deliveries of previously ordered supplies have continued during this period. Over the past two months medical personnel or supplies or both have been provided by Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Qatar, and the PRC. Military clothing, small arms, spare parts and ammunition have been furnished by Syria, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Pakistan, and the Soviet Union. These recent Somali purchases appear to have been financed with Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti funds.

17. However, while the Arabs have been willing to supply small arms, spare parts, ammunition, and related support equipment, they are unwilling, so far, to provide the heavy combat equipment needed by Somalia to replace losses in the Ogaden. Saudi money should be sufficient to allow Siad to continue to acquire small arms and ammunition on the open market and from some West European countries. However, major

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military equipment is unavailable from Western sources because of political constraints and prior commitments by potential armors. Saudi Arabia is applying political pressure on West European countries to be more forthcoming, but we doubt such pressure will achieve results. Somalia will soon face serious shortages of planes, tanks, and armored personnel carriers should the present rate of combat losses continue.

C. POL

18. Available information seems to indicate that Somalia has or can obtain adequate POL supplies to sustain the current level of fighting for the foreseeable future. The major problem for the Somalis is to transport POL from coastal storage facilities to the areas where the fighting is taking place some 200 to 500 miles inland. While this is a definite limitation on the magnitude and pace of combat operations, Somali efforts to reduce its impact have been adequate in the past, and we believe the Somalis will be able to successfully manage this situation in the future.

19. In recent years the Soviets have helped the Somalis expand their POL storage capacity to more than 800,000 barrels. Some 35 percent (275,000 barrels) of this capacity is in the north around Berbera and Hargeisa and the remainder in the south--principally at Mogadiscio and Chisimaio.

20. Somali POL imports have more than tripled since 1971 to some 1 million barrels per year. A portion of these increased imports went into the newly constructed storage capacity so when the fighting began the Somalis had some 500,000 to 800,000 barrels in reserve. The Soviets have been the principal supplier of petroleum to Somalia and have contracted to supply 1 million barrels during 1977. Should the Soviets cut off or slow deliveries, the Somalis would have no trouble obtaining supplies from the Arab producing states.

21. Estimating the amount of POL the Somalis are consuming during the sporadic fighting in the Ogaden is difficult. However, based on data we have developed from comparable Soviet mechanized and armored formations we would estimate that the Somali army is consuming some 5,000 barrels per day (bpd) when heavy fighting is taking place and some 2,500 bpd during lulls.

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D. Political Considerations Affecting Somali Activity

22. Early Strategy. Early this year, Somali President Siad concluded that the time was opportune to escalate the fighting in the Ogaden. We believe the actual decision to commit regular forces was not made until May or early June. Siad's original intent was to have the insurgents conduct the actual fighting, with Mogadiscio providing logistic and some advisory support. The inability of the insurgents to achieve significant gains led Siad to introduce regular forces to regain the momentum of the fighting.

23. Internal Factors. Siad does not appear to face serious opposition to his rule. Some members of the ruling military hierarchy may be unhappy with Siad's handling of the war, and serious Somali military setbacks would probably raise more doubts about his recent policies. However, his political survival would not necessarily be threatened. The decision to try to seize the Ogaden seems to have been supported by a consensus among the hierarchy. There is no indication that any faction distanced itself from that policy to the extent that it could turn the policy's failure against Siad. The Somalis are more likely to blame the Soviets than Siad if an Ethiopian counterattack is successful.

24. External Factors. Siad has not been able to acquire support for Somalia from international organizations. The OAU has refused to endorse his claims that Ethiopia is a colonialist power and the insurgents represent a liberation front. In fact, the OAU has endorsed Ethiopia's position under the OAU principle of territorial integrity. In deference to the OAU, even the Arab League refused to endorse the insurgents' claims. The US and other Western countries have withdrawn, at least for the present, their offer to provide "defensive" arms. The Soviets have adopted an openly pro-Ethiopian stance and are refusing to enter into new arms agreements.

III. Expected Developments

A. Ethiopia's Strategy

25. Factors Affecting a Counterattack. Addis Ababa enjoys a substantial manpower reserve, and massive quantities

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of military equipment are now arriving from the Soviet Union and its allies. This includes some 200 tanks, 50 artillery pieces, 60 APCs, and about 15 MIG-21s to Ethiopia; and they have promised a total of 48 MIGs, five missile boats, and surface-to-air missiles.

26. Ethiopia would have already achieved a numerical edge in tanks but for the losses incurred in the fighting at Jijiga. An unanticipated side effect of the battles at Jijiga and Kabredehar has been the upgrading of the Ethiopian tank fleet. Most of the vehicles lost at Jijiga were obsolescent models built after World War II. They are being replaced with more modern Soviet tanks, offering a greatly increased operational radius and a more powerful main gun.

27. Ethiopia's Air Force also stands to improve its operational capabilities in the near future. At the present rate of delivery and assembly, one squadron of MIG-21s, about 15 aircraft, could be operational by mid-November.

28. The regime's immediate strategy is to gain time to absorb the new Soviet equipment. Some units could be operational within six months. However, more time will be required to prepare adequately for a concerted counterattack. Some problems which might inhibit a successful counterattack include:

- Morale. Since mid-July there have been numerous indications of sagging morale, and there is some question whether the regular units and militia personnel can be relied upon to mount an effective effort. Ethiopian troops operating in the desert will be mostly conscripted highlanders, unused to conditions in the Ogaden and, judging by the performance of the militia, inadequately prepared to fight Somali mobile infantry, tanks, and heavy artillery.
- Assimilation Of New Equipment. Transitioning Ethiopian fighter pilots to Soviet aircraft should not prove unduly challenging, but training tank crews, radio repairmen, mechanics, and other hard-skill specialists will be time consuming and frustrating. The failure of the People's Militia

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at Gode, and the ineffective performance of the newly created T-34 and M-47 battalions at Jijiga, should have demonstrated to the Ethiopians the futility of sending partially trained recruits into combat without adequate preparation. The Soviets take 5 1/2 months to train a tank crewman (four to six weeks of basic training, followed by four months of advanced training in a tank unit). If the Ethiopians follow this schedule in organizing their T-54/55 battalions, the Ethiopian counterattack could be delayed until early 1978. If they do not follow a realistic training schedule they are in danger of losing still more of their tank force.

- Vulnerability of Supply Lines. Interior supply lines will be susceptible to guerrilla action, while the vital overland route to Assab is vulnerable to attack. The damage to the Assab refinery and the port facilities could have a crippling effect on Ethiopian plans for a counterattack.

- Army Internal Weaknesses. The Ethiopian Army is plagued with numerous operational and organizational weaknesses which will continue to inhibit combat effectiveness over the coming months. Included among these are: a weak military chain of command, its effectiveness hampered by continuous PMAC interferences; the loss of many experienced military leaders and trained technicians; the growing reliance on poorly trained, inexperienced militia personnel; an ineffective personnel management and maintenance system; poor intra- and inter- service cooperation; a shortage of operational air defense radars; limited aerial reconnaissance capabilities; and a limited ground mobility capability. While some of these deficiencies will undoubtedly be overcome in the future, they nevertheless remain as obstacles to current combat effectiveness, and are likely to remain so over the short term.

B. Somalia's Dilemma

29. Siad finds himself in a situation he may not have anticipated. While he can disregard OAU and other external

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pressure for a cease-fire or withdrawal of regular combat forces from Ethiopia, he cannot disregard the hard fact of a diminishing stockpile of war materiel. Nevertheless, we believe the SNA is preparing to mount a major military offensive in the Harar - Dire Dawa area in the north, while keeping up the pressure in Bale and Sidamo provinces. We believe he has an even chance of succeeding on both fronts, but the costs in manpower and materiel will be high. Once these objectives have been taken we would expect the SNA to halt its advance, and assume a defensive posture.

30. Unless Somalia can rapidly repair its losses in combat vehicles and aircraft, and adequately train and equip the replacements needed to bring the forward battalions and groups back to full strength, the long-term forecast is less promising. Ethiopia's demonstrated air superiority will further aggravate Somalia's defensive problems, as will fighting at the outer limits of their supply line. Poor roads, weather problems, and potential shortages of cargo vehicles, will exacerbate the existing equipment shortages and further weaken the units scattered along the eastern edge of the Ethiopian massif.

31. The major insurgent organizations, the Western Somalia Liberation and the Somali Abo Liberation Front, are playing a crucial part in the Somali successes in Ethiopia. During the period January to July 1977 the insurgents performed invaluable service in gathering intelligence on Ethiopian troop dispositions and organizing the Somali population inside Ethiopia to assist in the more conventional aspects of the summer campaign. Once the war began, the insurgents bore the brunt of the early fighting at Dire Dawa, Dagahabur, Kabredehar, Gode, El Carre, Neghelli Borana, and numerous small outposts along the former border. Now that the war has moved into a more orthodox phase, the insurgents will probably be reinforced with personnel recruited from among the Somali population in the Ogaden. It is possible that some of the insurgents will become the armed forces of an independent Western Somalia or perhaps, at a later date, that it will be absorbed directly into the Somali National Army. In either event, their importance as a fighting force is expected to increase as the combat capabilities of regular Somali forces in the Ogaden tend to decrease.

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IV. CONCLUSIONS

32. Despite Somali denials of direct involvement in the Ogaden fighting, nearly a third of Somalia's regular units have been active in the Ogaden since late July.

33. The Somalis have been successful because they have been able to keep the pace of the fighting within the range of their limited resources. This includes a strategy of relying as much as possible on insurgents to pin down Ethiopian defenders and husbanding POL and ammunition supplies for a series of almost evenly spaced major attacks.

34. Despite the prospect that Somalia will pay a high price in both manpower and material, we expect Siad to continue the offensive until he has achieved his military objectives of capturing Dire Dawa, Harar, and a few remaining strongholds in the south and establishing a defensive position. We believe Siad has an even chance of achieving his objectives, but that he must do so by the end of the year.

35. Arab military and financial aid should provide Somalia with sufficient small arms, ammunition, and spare parts, but Siad seems unlikely to find an alternative source to replace the major military equipment the Soviets are refusing to supply. Saudi Arabian pressure on Arab and West European countries to be more forthcoming to Somali requests is unlikely to achieve results.

36. Ethiopia is determined to mount a counterattack as soon as possible. While some Ethiopian units armed with new Soviet equipment could be ready within six months, an effective counteroffensive will be delayed because of morale problems, vulnerable supply lines, lack of trained manpower, and other military deficiencies. For the present, recent deliveries of new Soviet aircraft should allow the Ethiopians to maintain their air superiority in the Ogaden and possibly conduct strikes into Somalia.

37. In the long run Ethiopia will regain the military advantage because of its superior manpower reserves and acquisition of Soviet military equipment.

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