

6 March 1978

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Somalia: Implications for President Siad of a
Somali Withdrawal

President Siad probably believes his political survival would be jeopardized if he withdrew Somali forces from the Ogaden without gaining either concessions from the other side or promises of military support for Somalia. In the absence of offsetting gains, Siad probably calculates that his political position would be better served by having his army pull back only under heavy military pressure.

Siad realizes that Somalia has almost no chance of halting the Ethiopian offensive. In his view, however, he must be seen to yield only in the face of an overwhelming force of Ethiopians, Cubans, and Soviets. Siad's strategy has thus been to stand and fight. This does not mean that he would allow the Somali army to be destroyed in the Ogaden. He might at some point order a withdrawal, but only when he can justify it as necessary on military grounds.

The serious Somali reverses at Jijiga over the weekend may make moot any option of a voluntary Somali withdrawal from the northern Ogaden and force Siad soon to decide what to do with his forces in the south. He is unlikely to unilaterally withdraw his forces in order to improve Somalia's legal and political position before international opinion. For Siad to pull his forces out of the Ogaden simply to remove the stigma of aggression from Somalia would be viewed by his governing colleagues and his countrymen as a betrayal of the Ogadeni Somalis and would give Siad's potential domestic opponents a strong weapon to use against him.

If Siad ordered a unilateral withdrawal, he would also be vulnerable to charges of tacitly admitting that Somalia had no right to pursue its irredentist claims -- an admission no Somali leader can afford to make. The Somalis will be unwilling to renounce permanently the "Greater Somalia" concept or to make a formal commitment not to sponsor future military operations in the Ogaden.

Fear of domestic political repercussions is therefore likely to prevent Siad from ordering a voluntary withdrawal of Somali forces from the Ogaden. To overcome these fears even partially, and thus make a voluntary pull back possible -- but still not certain -- Siad would have to receive assurances on some major points. At a minimum he would demand guarantees, supported by international agreements, of no reprisals against the Ogadeni Somalis. He would also demand -- in return for Somali withdrawal -- the withdrawal of Ethiopian, Cuban, and Soviet forces from the Ogaden, although he might be satisfied with an ultimate withdrawal rather than an immediate one.

Although he would not demand assurances of substantial foreign military support to resupply the Somali army, an offer to do this would be an inducement, since Siad could then present it to his domestic audience as evidence that Somalia would be able to fight another day. He would probably make this argument, at least privately, even if potential foreign donors stipulated that their assistance could be used for defensive purposes only.