

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER
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Intelligence Memorandum

The Coup Attempt in Somalia: Background

Somali President Siad may have provided the catalyst for the abortive coup attempt of 9 April when he ordered the arrest and execution of a large number of officers who fought in the Ogaden campaign. Siad was apparently attempting to head off potential troublemaking by officers embittered over the Somali army's defeat in the Ogaden.

The purges began in earnest shortly after the withdrawal of Somali regulars from the Ogaden in early March, and [redacted] involved officers primarily from clans in northern and central Somalia. Siad had long viewed these clans as contentious, disloyal elements. The clans, for their part, had for years bitterly resented the domination of Somali affairs by Siad's own clan -- the Marehans.

Many of the officers targeted for elimination by Siad were said to have been convinced that the Somali president used troops under their command as cannon fodder in the Ogaden while deliberately keeping officers from his own clan out of dangerous combat zones. The leaders of the 9 April coup, the most important of whom were field grade officers and veteran Ogaden troop commanders, came from these very same clan elements; they were motivated at least as much by long-standing ethnic animosities toward Siad as by disenchantment with Siad in the aftermath of the Ogaden debacle, although they clearly hoped to capitalize on broader anti-Siad feeling. There is no evidence that Soviets or pro-Soviet Somali elements were involved in this coup attempt, but the logic of the situation, as well as open Cuban broadcasts, argues that the Soviets and Cubans are working to overthrow Siad.

The coup collapsed quickly; it was ill-organized, and Siad apparently had advance knowledge of it which permitted him to move against the instigators and thereby force them to show their hand prematurely.

[redacted] the uprising was supposed to have begun in the northern city of Hargeisa where disgruntled Ogadeni military returnees were assembled in strength.

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Instead, the first action was taken in Mogadiscio, where pro-Siad loyalists were deployed in considerable numbers and in strong defensive positions. As a result, pro-Siad troops were able to put down the revolt — which on the dissident side may have involved as many as 10-12 officers, 2000 troops, and 65 tanks — in less than 24 hours, although mopping-up operations continued for some time thereafter.

There have been no major disturbances in the Mogadiscio area since the abortive coup attempt, and President Siad has taken a number of steps to strengthen the impression that he is in control of the government. His departure for a scheduled week-long visit to China only four days after the revolt had been quashed argues either great confidence or fatalism; he is currently in Cairo on another official visit.

Siad's security forces appear to have rounded up most of the coup plotters, including the Mogadiscio-based ringleader of the uprising. Siad is also [REDACTED] using the coup attempt as a pretext to move against potential challengers and political enemies in the Somali government and security apparatus who, largely because they belong to the same clan elements that instigated the coup, are being accused of sympathizing with its objectives.

On balance, however, the Somali leader is conducting his post-coup inquisition at a carefully measured pace, apparently out of fear that mass arrests and heavy-handed treatment of suspects might spark a major outbreak of clan warfare. Indeed, there have been reports of a series of disturbances in north-central Somalia in recent weeks that on the surface largely involve banditry, isolated shootings, and general unrest, but may stem from ethnic rivalries.

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