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# INTELLIGENCE NOTE

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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*Ethiopia  
file*

## ETHIOPIA: IN SEARCH OF ARMS

Ethiopia, alarmed by what it sees as a Soviet-aided resurgence of Somali irredentism, and concerned over the uncertain prospects for continued US military aid, is looking for new arms suppliers to replace or supplement the US. The Ethiopians have achieved few concrete results: no major power among possible suppliers--France, the USSR, or the PRC--has thus far shown interest in supplying sophisticated arms on the easy terms that the Ethiopians want.<sup>1/</sup> While the Ethiopians can buy arms commercially, doing that would oblige them to divert scarce resources from economic development to arms procurement. They may well conclude that the US, despite limitations on its military aid program, is their best bet after all, and may intensify pressures on Washington.

France. France, Ethiopia's neighbor in the TFAI (French Territory of the Afars and Issas), is unlikely to furnish more than token military assistance--a few helicopters on a grant basis and concessionary credit terms for military sales. The French calculate that economic aid,

<sup>1/</sup> The Ethiopian Foreign Minister recently estimated that Ethiopia would need \$100 million for defense over the next five years, over and above Ethiopia's current military budget. The Ethiopian military believe that they need \$450 million.

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together with such gestures as the Pompidou visit to Addis Ababa in January 1973, will enable them to maintain a basically satisfactory status quo. The Ethiopians have no leverage with the French; rather, they are dependent on the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad for their main outlet to the sea.

By providing Ethiopia large amounts of military aid, France would risk provoking renewed agitation for the union of the TFAI with Somalia. Such agitation in 1966-67 caused the French to consider withdrawing from the territory. Now, however, the French intend to hang on as long as possible. The TFAI's economic value will increase if the Suez Canal is reopened. More importantly, its strategic significance has grown as French access to southern Indian Ocean bases (Madagascar and, prospectively, the Comoro Islands) has deteriorated. Over 5,000 French troops are now stationed in the TFAI; this is the largest French intervention force in the Indian Ocean area.

USSR. Although Ethiopia mistrusts Communists and would rather not mix equipment from Western and Communist countries, Haile Selassie may have asked for Soviet arms during his Moscow visit in October 1973. In past years the USSR has offered military equipment to Ethiopia, coupled with the suggestion that American aid be terminated, but Moscow now seems reluctant to risk its relations with Somalia and apparently turned down the Emperor's request. The Soviets presumably set a higher value on their profitable military arrangements with the Somalis than on their potential

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gains with the Ethiopians. The possibility remains, nevertheless, that the USSR might attempt to work both sides of the fence, particularly if future Somali arms requests reach unacceptable levels.

Ethiopian diplomatic protests to the USSR over military deliveries to Somalia have met with reassurances that the arms are defensive and that Moscow supports the existing Ethiopian-Somali border. Moscow certainly has an interest in restraining Somali adventurism because open hostilities might complicate or even endanger Soviet tenure in Somalia, which relates to the USSR's Indian Ocean, rather than to its African, interests.

PRC. Ethiopian spokesmen have claimed that the PRC has responded positively to an Ethiopian request for military assistance, but thus far that has not been confirmed. Chinese interest in the Horn of Africa is evident in generous economic aid credits to Ethiopia (\$84 million) and Somalia (\$110 million). The PRC probably wants to keep a foothold in both countries while awaiting the development of more favorable political conditions. In Ethiopia, Peking hopes for a friendlier regime after Haile Selassie's death, while in Somalia it aspires to be the beneficiary of any future falling-out between the Somalis and Soviets. In neighboring Sudan, the Chinese played just such a waiting game, eventually taking advantage of the 1971 cooling of Sudanese-Soviet relations to improve their position through economic and military assistance.

The PRC has refused since 1969 to become involved in interstate disputes in Africa. Nevertheless, the Chinese Ambassador in Addis Ababa

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allegedly has endorsed privately Ethiopia's position in the border dispute with Somalia. The Chinese might be willing to supply Ethiopia with small arms, calculating that limited aid would not jeopardize the PRC's presence in Somalia, which finds the PRC useful as a counterweight to the USSR.

Other Countries. Ethiopia's other prospects seem even poorer. Yugoslavia, a nonaligned friend, might be willing to supply light arms, but only on a cash basis. Among Ethiopia's newfound Arab friends, only Saudi Arabia has the money to fund extensive arms purchases. Whatever inducements King Faisal may have offered to secure Ethiopia's break with Israel, he is not likely to provide military aid, although he might make development assistance grants or offer low-interest loans.

The US Position. After making the rounds of prospective suppliers, the Ethiopians may well conclude that the US is their best bet after all. Even so, they are unlikely to be any more easily persuaded than at present to adjust their expectations to the limitations on US military assistance. They will therefore probably intensify pressures on the US to go beyond the \$16.3 million in grants and credits offered for FY 1973. In addition to their desire to redress what they believe to be a military imbalance, the Ethiopians now see military aid as a tangible symbol of US interest in, and concern for, Ethiopia's future.

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