

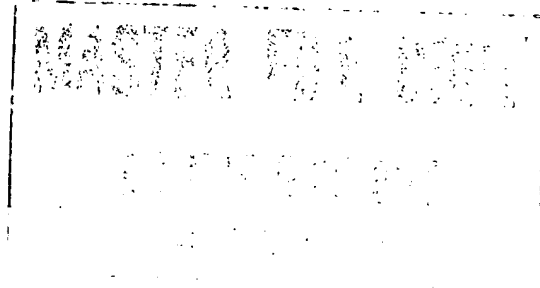


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Ethiopia: The Northern Insurgencies



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A Research Paper

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*ALA 84-10105
October 1984*

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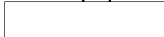

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Ethiopia: The Northern Insurgencies



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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by 
 Office of African and Latin American
Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate
of Operations. 

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Ethiopia:
The Northern Insurgencies

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 21 October 1984
was used in this report.*

Ethiopia's military position in its two northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigray has steadily deteriorated over the past two years. Eritrean insurgents, who are fighting for independence, have increased the area under their control and put the Ethiopian Army on the defensive. In Tigray Province, insurgents dominate most of the rural area and have expanded their operations into Tigrean-inhabited areas of neighboring Gonder and Welo Provinces.

Ethiopian efforts to crush both insurgencies through large-scale military operations have failed, with heavy losses of men and equipment. Morale within the military has plummeted and serious deficiencies in training, tactics, and leadership have been highlighted. At the strong urging of his senior commanders and Soviet advisers—including the Commander of Soviet Ground Forces General Petrov—Chairman Mengistu has called a temporary halt to major offensive operations while launching programs to try to correct these problems.

Despite their recent gains, we believe that neither the Eritreans nor the Tigreans have the capability to defeat decisively the Ethiopians. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the only effective insurgent force in the province, is a formidable organization, but lacks the quantities of heavy weapons and air defense equipment necessary to engage the Ethiopians in sustained conventional combat. Forces of the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) are lightly armed, lack mobility, and receive little outside assistance, although they do have a close working relationship with the EPLF.

Ethiopia's northern war continues to attract outside intervention. Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and several other Arab states provide varying amounts of assistance to several Eritrean factions, although the level of aid has declined over the past four years. The Soviet Union, which is committed to defending the Mengistu regime and protecting its access to air and naval facilities in Eritrea, provides weapons and advisory assistance to the Ethiopians. Soviet advisers help plan operations and are attached to Ethiopian military units in the field. Cuba, which has consistently refused to provide troops in the north, performs only limited advisory and logistic functions.

The government has paid a high political and economic price to pursue its military objectives in the north. Popular support for the regime has eroded because of the declining economy, the growing Soviet presence, and the

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continuing heavy demand for military inductees. Economic costs directly attributable to the fighting, which we estimate are at least \$3 billion since 1974, include government defense and refugee expenses, physical damage, and lost industrial and agricultural production and exports. Indirect costs—which we are unable to quantify—include reduced business confidence, capital flight, and the need to cut development expenditures to pay for defense. In addition, dissatisfaction among some senior military and security officers over the conduct of the war was probably behind coup plotting late last year. Mengistu successfully preempted this threat by postponing his plans for an offensive.

The Mengistu regime, however, is willing to pay the costs involved to maintain Ethiopia's territorial integrity. The threat to the government's stability remains low because the officer corps—the key pillar of the regime—despite some concern over Mengistu's overall tactics in the north has little sympathy for civilian grievances.

We believe that the Ethiopians will launch another major offensive in Eritrea within the next six months. Addis Ababa probably will be able to reverse at least some of its recent losses but, in our view, has no prospect of crushing the Eritreans militarily. In Tigray Province, we see little or no prospect for a major breakthrough by either side, although the intensity of the fighting will periodically escalate. At the same time, efforts to find a political solution to the insurgencies will continue to prove futile with none of the actors willing to make significant concessions.

Moscow appears in a position to perpetuate its influence with Addis Ababa in either a continuing military stalemate or a negotiated peace. Moscow can continue to try to broker a political settlement while supplying military hardware to the Mengistu regime, thereby assuring continued access to Ethiopian naval and air facilities. If successful as a mediator, Moscow would enhance its political credentials in the region.

In the unlikely event that the Mengistu government falls, a successor government would probably continue efforts to retain Ethiopian territorial integrity. Thus, even a pro-Western junta would find it difficult to break with the Soviets because of its need for arms to combat the insurgents. In addition, Moscow stands to gain from Ethiopia's directing its mounting frustration at Sudan and Somalia, both of which are friendly to the United States, or at the United States itself.

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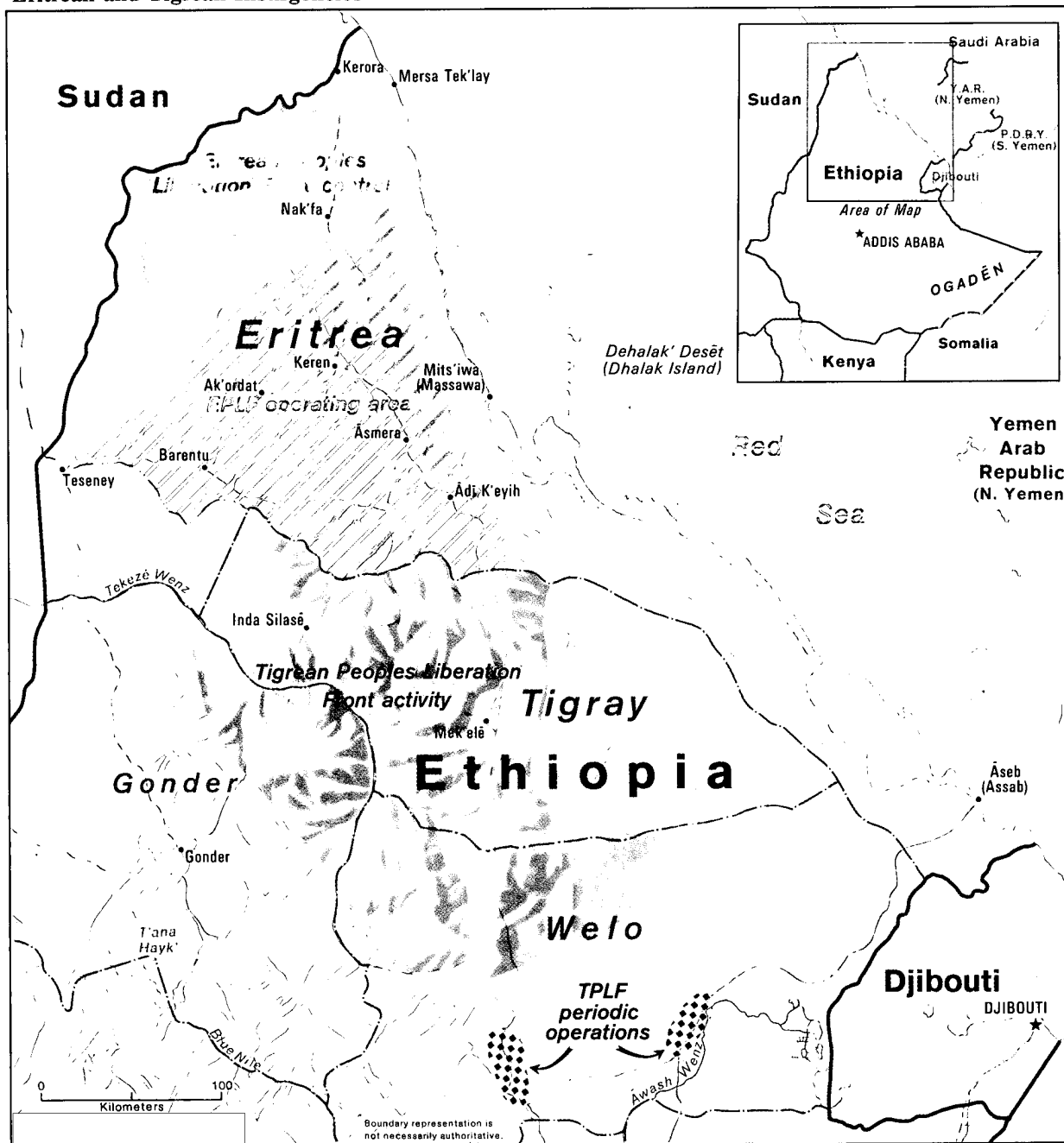
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Eritrean and Tigrean Insurgencies



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Insurgent Forces

EPLF	20,000-24,000
TPLF	15,000

Government Forces

Eritrea	75,000
Tigray	12,000
Gonder	8,000

Note: All figures are approximate.
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**Ethiopia:
The Northern Insurgencies** [redacted]

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Introduction

The political, economic, and human cost for Ethiopia of more than two decades of conflict in its northern region has been high. Even so, the military government appears firmly committed to either crushing the insurgencies militarily or forcing a political settlement on its terms. The Eritreans, in rebellion since 1962,¹ have been equally obstinate in insisting on independence, while the leadership of the nine-year-old Tigrean rebellion is intent on overthrowing the regime. Although none of the parties involved in the fighting seem capable of achieving their goals through a definitive military victory, animosities are so deep that the prospects for a political solution are almost nonexistent. [redacted]

government resistance, the Ethiopian Army and Tigrean insurgents engaged in almost continuous combat from late 1982 until November of last year. Although the Army scored several successes, it suffered heavy casualties and failed to inflict a crushing defeat on the rebels; the Tigreans, on the other hand, succeeded in expanding their operations into Tigrean-inhabited portions of northern Gonder and Welo Provinces. [redacted]

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In our judgment, Addis Ababa continues to view the Eritrean rebellion, to which it has committed approximately 75,000² troops, as its principal threat despite the Tigrean upsurge. According to the US Embassy, the government believes—correctly, in our view—that the integrity of the Ethiopian state would be threatened by military defeat or significant concessions to the insurgents, including the probable loss of the critical ports of Assab and Massawa. [redacted]

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The Military Situation

Ethiopia's military position in its northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigray has eroded steadily since the collapse of the much-heralded 1982 "Red Star" campaign—an offensive designed to crush the Eritrean rebellion and, by extension, the Tigrean insurgency. According to diplomatic reporting, its failure, at the cost of heavy casualties, left the northern Army demoralized with many units under strength and unable to break the stalemate that persisted in Eritrea throughout 1983. [redacted]

The Eritrean Struggle Resumes

Since the beginning of this year, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)³—numbering 20,000 to 24,000 combatants—has seized the initiative in the fighting and scored several major victories over the government forces, corroborated independently by press, US defense attache, and Embassy reporting:

- In January they overran the border town of Teseney, routed the Ethiopian garrison, and forced hundreds of troops to flee into neighboring Sudan.

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During the lull in Eritrea, Addis Ababa's military strategy indicated increasing concern over the spreading insurgency in Tigray Province. After a year of steady rebel gains in the countryside against limited

² Military strength figures for government and insurgent forces are estimates based on order-of-battle data collected from a wide variety of classified and unclassified sources. [redacted]

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³ Although the Eritrean Movement is split into several factions, only the EPLF has sizable combat forces in Ethiopia and actually controls territory. Unless otherwise specified, references to the Eritrean guerrillas are to EPLF forces. [redacted]

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¹ Until Eritrea became an Italian colony in 1889, the region consisted of several fragmented entities under the domination of various neighboring countries. Italian rule was ended by British forces in 1941. London administered the region until 1952 when, under UN auspices, it was federated with Ethiopia despite Eritrean opposition to the union. During the 10-year existence of the federation, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie used quasi-legal means and intimidation to undermine it. In November 1962, Ethiopia absorbed Eritrea as the country's 14th province. [redacted]

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Major Military Operations in the North Since the Revolution

Date	Developments
January-October 1975	Both the government and the Eritreans launched a series of campaigns for control of the province's urban areas and lines of communication. Addis Ababa had some success in reasserting control over the cities and towns, but the insurgents clearly dominated the countryside.
May-June 1976	Addis Ababa organized a "peasants' march," designed to crush the Eritreans and to populate the countryside with loyal Tigreans and Amharas. The poorly armed, led, and trained peasants—who numbered up to 50,000—were routed by Eritrean attacks in northern Tigray Province, causing the campaign to collapse.
March-December 1977	The ELF and EPLF launched major attacks in Eritrea. This period marked the high water mark of Eritrean control of the province as all government garrisons were overrun except for Asmara, Massawa, Assab, Barentu, and Adi K'eyih (all except Assab came under siege).
June-December 1978	Addis Ababa launched massive attacks, mainly from Tigray Province, which succeeded in rolling back Eritrean forces. The ELF suffered heavy casualties (as did their Tigrean allies), and the EPLF was pushed back to their mountain stronghold around the town of Nak'fa.
April-July 1979	The government launched two major assaults on the EPLF stronghold of Nak'fa. Both efforts were defeated and Addis Ababa suffered approximately 15,000 casualties.
December 1979-January 1980	The EPLF launched a preemptive attack on Ethiopian forces south of Nak'fa. The insurgents overran forward positions, inflicting up to 4,000 casualties, capturing much equipment, and demoralizing government troops.
September-October 1980	The Ethiopian Army launched a limited offensive against TPLF guerrillas who were attacking major highways and government garrisons in Tigray Province. The operation had only limited success because the TPLF avoided major engagements.
February-June 1982	Ethiopia launched, with much fanfare, the "Red Star" campaign designed to capture Nak'fa and break the back of the EPLF. Although Addis Ababa moved to within a few kilometers of the town, the offensive collapsed because of stiff insurgent opposition. The Ethiopian Army suffered up to 20,000 casualties.
September-November 1982	Addis Ababa launched another inconclusive campaign against TPLF forces in Tigray Province.
February-April 1983	The Ethiopian Army again went on the offensive in Tigray Province. Addis Ababa, after heavy fighting, occupied a number of towns long held by the insurgents. The TPLF, however, blunted the drive by inflicting heavy casualties on several government units.

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February-November 1983 The EPLF and TPLF launched a series of attacks against government forces. The Tigrean insurgency spread to Gonder and Welo Provinces. Addis Ababa suffered at least 15,000 casualties in the fighting and was clearly put on the defensive in Tigray and Gonder Provinces.

January-March 1984 The EPLF resumed offensive operations, capturing the towns of Teseney, Kerora, and Mersa Tek'lay, all of which had been under government control since 1978. Addis Ababa was unable to initiate effective counterattacks and has been content to maintain control of major population centers.

[REDACTED]

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- In March insurgent forces overwhelmed Ethiopian units at Mersa Tek'lay and Kerora, captured an important supply base, and drove Ethiopian forces southward from their garrisons along the Sudanese border.
- In late May EPLF commandos raided the major Ethiopian airbase near the provincial capital of Asmara, destroying or damaging two Soviet IL-38 naval reconnaissance aircraft and several Ethiopian helicopters and jet fighters.

In addition, EPLF forces located south of their mountain stronghold of Nak'fa have inflicted moderate-to-high casualties on government troops during a series of skirmishes in recent months. Most of the fighting has been at a relatively low intensity, however, with both sides jockeying to improve their tactical positions along ridge lines. [REDACTED]

Eritrean Goals and Tactics. We believe the EPLF, for its part, is content to pursue a war of attrition. Offensive operations appear aimed principally at gaining publicity, maximizing Ethiopian casualties, and eroding the capabilities of the Ethiopian military. For example, the attack on the airbase at Asmara was designed, in our opinion, to weaken Ethiopian morale by highlighting the vulnerability of such a major military facility. The insurgents also attempt to exploit weaknesses in the Ethiopian defenses to increase the area under their control, such as the capture of Teseney, but generally have avoided major combat in areas where Addis Ababa can bring its superiority in heavy weapons to bear. [REDACTED]

The Eritreans, although inferior in numbers and equipment to their opponents, have exploited effectively the difficult terrain to neutralize Ethiopian advantages. According to several journalists who have been to the Nak'fa front, rebel positions are well camouflaged and deeply dug into the hillsides. These positions reduce the effectiveness of Ethiopian armor and mechanized units, artillery, and airstrikes. As a result, Ethiopian forces are often involved in fighting that requires continued infantry assaults against fortified, high-ground positions without effective support from their heavy weapons. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, we believe the Eritrean insurgents will not be able to achieve a decisive military victory, primarily because they lack the quantities of heavy weapons and air defense artillery necessary to engage the Ethiopian Army in sustained conventional operations. As a result, the lightly armed guerrillas are unable to capture large urban areas or garrisons that are heavily defended by government troops. Moreover, the EPLF receives significantly less economic and military assistance than other Eritrean factions from the Arab states because of its Marxist-Christian composition. [REDACTED]

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The Army's Problems. Several US Embassy sources report that the government was planning a major offensive of its own earlier this year. This operation was suspended, however, because of opposition from Mengistu's senior military commanders and his Soviet

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advisers. They argued that the northern Army needed time to rebuild its understrength units, to conduct tactical training, and to improve the morale of the frontline troops who have suffered heavy casualties over the past two years. [redacted]

Ethiopia is attempting to address these problems. Since the beginning of this year, according to the US Embassy, Addis Ababa has stepped up its recruitment campaign throughout the country and initiated compulsory military service for all Ethiopians reaching 18. According to US military analysts, there are over 3 million physically fit draft age Ethiopians. Several new training facilities have been constructed to accommodate the influx. [redacted]

[redacted] According to military attache reporting, several thousand recruits already have been sent to the northern front, although the majority of the initial inductees under the program will not be ready until their training is completed later this year. [redacted]

The effort to flesh out the Army, however, has encountered several problems. Morale among the inductees is low, according to various Embassy and attache sources, resulting in a small but continuous stream of deserters fleeing into Sudan or returning to their villages. In addition, the training most receive is rudimentary and probably does little to prepare new recruits for combat against veteran Eritrean insurgents. [redacted]

In our view, the most serious problem facing the Ethiopian Army in Eritrea is the shortage of experienced junior officers and senior NCOs. The casualty rate among these two groups, according to various US defense attache sources, has been especially high because most of the fighting in Eritrea has involved small-unit clashes and close-in fighting. [redacted]

US Embassy [redacted] reports confirm that the Ethiopians also suffer from a weak logistic network in Eritrea, which has made shortages of food, spare parts, fuel, and ammunition commonplace even among the best and most well-supplied units. The military has made serious efforts to address these weaknesses, according to Embassy sources, but the scale of assistance needed and the strains on the transportation system often overwhelm the military

planners. Consequently, maintenance problems, insurgent ambushes, and shortages of fuel often delay or limit the shipment of supplies to the front. [redacted]

The Tigrean Insurgency

While the Eritreans have settled on a war of attrition, forces of the Marxist-dominated Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) have significantly expanded their area of operations over the past two years.⁴ The insurgents now control large parts of rural Tigray Province, and several small towns and have solidified their control over Tigrean-inhabited areas of adjoining Gonder and Welo Provinces. The insurgents also have occasionally raided larger urban areas. Fighting has been limited during the past six months, however, both because the Ethiopians have scaled back their military operations and because the insurgents probably are suffering supply shortages after the heavy fighting late last year. [redacted]

The TPLF, which we estimate to number 15,000 regulars and militia, has avoided setpiece battles in favor of small-unit, classic guerrilla operations against isolated garrisons and lines of communication, a major factor in its success. [redacted]

the TPLF also has established an effective intelligence network among a largely sympathetic populace. [redacted]

We believe, on the basis of our meetings with TPLF officials, that the group suffers from several key weaknesses that severely limit its overall military effectiveness:

- Its forces are lightly armed, possessing only a few heavy weapons either captured in battle or provided by the EPLF, and are unable to challenge the Ethiopians in conventional combat.
- The insurgents' mobility is limited by a shortage of motor vehicles.

⁴ According to a Tigrean spokesman, the TPLF would like to see the Government of Ethiopia transformed into a civilian-led federation, providing for the full and equal participation of the various ethnic groups in the country. Failing this, he stated that the TPLF would like to acquire either a strong measure of autonomy or full independence for the province. We believe, however, that the Tigrean leadership's principal long-term objective is supplanting Amhara domination with Tigrean hegemony. [redacted]

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- Aside from its military alliance with the EPLF, which provides primarily small arms and training, the TPLF receives little outside assistance from neighboring Arab countries because of its Marxist-Christian makeup.
- The movement has limited appeal at best outside its region and, in fact, has been unable to win the support of the Amhara and other ethnic groups that border the Tigrean area. [redacted]

The US Embassy reports that the government has become increasingly concerned about the TPLF's challenge to Addis Ababa's control of Tigray Province and its overland supply routes to Eritrea. Moreover, the Tigreans are tying down approximately 20,000 government troops that Ethiopia would probably prefer to commit to the struggle in Eritrea. Although Addis Ababa has launched several offensive operations designed to crush the Tigrean forces, they have had only limited success primarily because the TPLF has avoided conventional battles in which Addis Ababa could bring to bear its superior numbers, firepower, and mobility. In addition, because of its extensive commitment in Eritrea, the government has been forced to supplement its Army with lightly armed, poorly trained local militia who have generally proved unreliable in combat, according to [redacted] US Embassy sources. [redacted]

We believe the Ethiopian campaign against the Tigreans is hindered by Mengistu's inability to see the insurgency as having roots separate from the Eritrean conflict.⁵ We conclude, on the basis of US Embassy reporting, that Mengistu and most of his commanders view the Tigrean insurgency as a front created by the Eritreans primarily because of the ties between the TPLF and EPLF. In this context, they believe that the Tigrean problem will wither away once the Eritrean conflict is ended. Thus, despite occasional offensive operations, troops stationed in Tigray have as their primary mission the defense of urban areas and highway links to Eritrea. [redacted]

External Involvement

The Arabs. The Eritrean rebellion in particular has long drawn the attention of neighboring countries and

⁵ For a detailed study of the roots of the Tigrean insurgency, see appendix. [redacted]

outside powers. Historically, the Arab states have provided political, economic, and military support to the Eritreans for a variety of reasons—including Pan-Arabism, influence projection, inter-Arab rivalries, and concern over Soviet gains in the region represented by the regime in Addis Ababa. Indeed, some states such as Iraq and Syria are, or have been, associated with several of the Eritrean groups, including the EPLF. In recent years, however, overall Arab assistance appears to have declined substantially, primarily because the Muslim-based Eritrean factions traditionally supported by the Arabs have been supplanted by the Marxist and largely Christian EPLF. [redacted]

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Sudan increasingly has sought to bolster the northern insurgents during the past year, according to the US Embassy. It has come to believe the only way to force Addis Ababa to end its assistance to southern Sudanese rebels is to back Ethiopia's own separatists, the Eritreans and Tigreans. Sudanese President Nimeiri and other senior officials frequently have expressed their belief to US officials that Ethiopia and its ally, Libya, are surrogates for a Soviet attempt to install a Marxist regime in Khartoum.⁶ [redacted]

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Although Sudan is unable to provide significant direct military or economic assistance to the insurgents, it permits all of the insurgent groups to use Sudanese territory as a base of operations and a logistic corridor for material supplied by other Arab states. Sudan also lobbies other Arab states, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to increase their aid to the insurgents, according to US Embassy officials. In addition, according to US defense attache reporting, Khartoum has returned some arms previously confiscated from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). [redacted]

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We believe Saudi Arabia continues as the major Arab supporter of the Eritreans. [redacted] the Saudi Government provides funds, medicine, food, and other support—but rarely arms—to the Muslim-dominated Eritrean groups. It also

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encourages other Arabs, such as the Persian Gulf states, to provide assistance. Riyadh's assistance to the weaker Eritrean factions, such as the ELF and Eritrean Liberation Front/Popular Liberation Forces (ELF/PLF), is designed to strengthen them politically and militarily vis-a-vis the EPLF. The EPLF and its ally, the TPLF, do not receive Saudi assistance because of their Marxist-Christian makeup, although occasionally the Saudis promise to consider such aid as an inducement to create a unified Eritrean movement. Saudi efforts to build such unity—centered upon the more conservative groups as an alternative to the EPLF—have not met with success, however, primarily because of the intense personal rivalries among the leaders of the various factions. According to spokesmen from one of the larger Eritrean groups, Riyadh has indicated that it will accept the EPLF in a united front, but only if all the factions are given equal representation. This proposal has been rebuffed by the EPLF, which sees the attempt as a poorly masked effort by Riyadh to weaken the movement's position. [redacted]

Syria and Iraq, according to several academic sources and press accounts, provided military assistance to the EPLF in the past, primarily in recognition of its progressive credentials and to counter Saudi assistance to the more conservative Eritrean fronts. We believe their support has declined significantly, however, because of their increasing preoccupation with their own conflicts. Even so, according to press accounts and Eritrean officials, both states, as well as Egypt, have kept up sporadic shipments in an effort to maintain some influence with the EPLF leadership. [redacted]

The paucity of Arab support has forced the EPLF to augment the procurement of weapons and supplies. [redacted]

[redacted] all heavy weapons—tanks, artillery, APCs—used by the EPLF were captured from the Ethiopians and maintained by EPLF technicians or Ethiopian defectors. Small arms, ammunition, and support equipment are either captured from the Ethiopians, self-produced, obtained from Arab benefactors, or purchased on the international arms market. Journalistic and academic sources state that almost

all of the funds for these purchases come from contributions obtained from expatriate Eritreans or the organization's smuggling operations. [redacted]

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The Soviet and Cuban Role. Moscow's support of Addis Ababa against the insurgents stems from its broad political-military commitment to the Mengistu regime. In addition, the Soviets' establishment of a naval support facility at Dahlak Island off the Eritrean coast and their use of Asmara Air Base by IL-38 naval reconnaissance aircraft give Moscow a direct stake in preventing Eritrean secession, in our opinion. As a result, Soviet arms and advisers are deeply involved in supporting the government campaigns in the north. In Eritrea, Soviet advisers are attached at least down to brigade-size units, and several have been killed or wounded in combat, according to attache reporting. Moscow's advisers also are involved in planning military operations against the insurgents in both Tigray and Eritrea, according to several Embassy sources. The Soviet Commander of Ground Forces, General Petrov, has traveled repeatedly to Ethiopia to oversee major ground operations in the north in recent years. According to the US Embassy, he played a key role in convincing Mengistu to cancel a major offensive planned for Eritrea earlier this year and to concentrate instead on retraining and equipping the northern Army. [redacted]

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Moscow also has attempted, unsuccessfully, to broker a political settlement to the conflict, but Eritrean officials report that they rejected the Soviet proposals. According to US Embassy reporting, the Soviets continue to advise Mengistu to find a political formula to end the fighting, a recommendation causing some tension in Moscow's relationship with the Mengistu regime. The Ethiopian leadership is sensitive to outside criticism of its internal policies, and, we believe, they are also suspicious of Soviet policy toward the Eritrean conflict. The Ethiopians most certainly recall that Moscow was a firm backer of Eritrea's right to independence during the Haile Selassie regime and of the numerous reports of Soviet aid to the insurgents during that time. [redacted]

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Efforts To Negotiate a Settlement in the North

Over the years, several efforts have been made to find a solution to the Eritrean problem. Sudanese President Nimeiri, who has stated to US Embassy officials that Soviet influence in Ethiopia will end only with a political settlement, has been the most consistent advocate of negotiations. According to Eritrean and Sudanese officials, Nimeiri has often cooperated with Saudi Arabia to try to establish an Eritrean negotiating team consisting of all the groups to facilitate talks with the Ethiopians. Eritrean factionalism, however, has prevented the formation of such a negotiating team and talks have not begun. Sudanese and Saudi efforts to pressure the Eritreans by threats to reduce support have been weakened by its limited scope. They have been further offset by the Muslim-dominated insurgent groups' ability to get limited support from other Arab supporters and their lack of influence with the EPLF. In recent years, Nimeiri's efforts have been further frustrated by the refusal of the dominant EPLF, whose participation is vital to the success of any negotiations, to cooperate with the other factions. [redacted]

Two of the Eritrean groups have held unilateral talks with the Ethiopians in recent years. In the early 1980s, the Eritrean Liberation Front, according to a spokesman [redacted] held a series of secret meetings with the Ethiopians in Rome. The talks reportedly were arranged by the Italian Communist Party. The ELF leadership had hoped to arrange a separate peace that would guarantee it a dominant role in a postwar Eritrea, according to Sudanese officials. The Eritreans stated, however, that Addis Ababa was not willing to make any meaningful concession. In our opinion, the Mengistu government viewed these talks as a device to further divide the Eritrean movement—which was already suffering from strains between the ELF and EPLF—and to split the ELF from its Arab benefactors. [redacted]

The talks collapsed, according to Sudanese officials, when Khartoum became aware of them and pressured the ELF to withdraw. Nimeiri was concerned that

any agreement that excluded the other Eritrean factions, especially the EPLF, would lead to a civil war among the Eritreans, compounding Sudanese security problems along the frontier. [redacted]

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The Soviet Union, acting both directly and through the East Germans, has attempted on several occasions to strike an agreement between the EPLF and Addis Ababa. According to EPLF leaders, Moscow has stressed that the common Marxist ideology shared by the EPLF and the Mengistu regime guarantees the protection of Eritrean rights in a unified Ethiopian state. The EPLF leadership, however, rebuffed the Soviets by denying the relevancy of ideology to the conflict. Indeed, EPLF spokesmen stated that, according to the writings of Lenin, Eritrea has a right as a nation to determine for itself the nature of its relationship with Ethiopia. According to the Eritreans, denial of this right by Addis Ababa cast doubts on the regime's Marxist credentials. [redacted]

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During 1983 and early this year, representatives of the EPLF have stated that they secretly met directly with Ethiopian delegations in Rome and Athens on several occasions. According to an EPLF spokesman, however, Addis Ababa refused to expand on its offer of limited autonomy for the province within the framework of a centralized state. For its part, the EPLF refused to budge from its demand that Ethiopia recognize Eritrea's right to independence or, at a minimum, to an impartially supervised plebiscite within Eritrea on the issue. [redacted]

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The US Embassy reports—and we concur—that the government has not opened negotiations with the Tigrean rebels because the Mengistu government views the Tigrean insurgency as merely an extension of the Eritrean conflict. [redacted]

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Cuba also supported the Eritrean independence struggle before to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie. We believe, however, that Castro views the Marxist regime in Addis Ababa as capable of addressing the grievances of the Eritreans within a centralized state. Cuba, at the same time, has refused several Ethiopian requests to provide troops for the northern campaigns, although it provides limited advisory and logistic support, according to the US Embassy. We believe Havana realizes the war is unwinnable, and Castro is concerned over the high Cuban casualties a protracted counterinsurgency campaign could entail. Castro's unwillingness to become involved in the fighting probably contributed to Ethiopia's decision last year to request a drawdown in the Cuban military presence, according to the US Embassy. Senior Ethiopian officers resented having to support several thousand Cuban troops whose role was limited to garrison duty in the Ogaden region as a deterrent against a much-diminished Somali threat. [redacted]

Assessing the Costs

We believe that Ethiopia's pursuit of a military option in the north has proved extremely costly socially, militarily, politically, and economically. There is, according to the US Embassy, a war weariness in the capital and other urban areas that exacerbates discontent with regime policies. Although this unhappiness has not translated into support for the insurgents—indeed most Ethiopians, especially the dominant Amharas, oppose Eritrean succession—it has fueled a desire that the government find some type of political settlement to the conflict. According to the US Embassy, the middle class and other educated segments of society hold the regime's commitment to the war at least partly to blame for their declining economic fortunes and the increasing Soviet role in Ethiopia. [redacted]

According to the US Embassy—whose access is admittedly restricted—there is also growing opposition to Mengistu in the rural areas, the source of the vast majority of military inductees. The Embassy reports that rural families are resisting the recruitment efforts and at times the government has coerced localities into meeting their quotas, further alienating the populace from the military government. [redacted]

Overall, the Eritrean and Tigrean insurgencies have contributed to the regime's steadily eroding popular support. We agree with the US Embassy's assessment that the rule of Mengistu, whose position rests upon the backing of military officials who have little sympathy for civilian complaints about conscription or economic difficulties, is not directly threatened. In the view of the US Embassy, the regime's pervasive security apparatus, which has reacted swiftly to any signs of open dissent, appears to have thoroughly intimidated the population. [redacted]

Impact on the Military

Mengistu—with some effort—appears to have maintained the support of his senior commanders even though some of his military tactics in the north have caused some divisions within the Army and clearly have resulted in a decline in the military's effectiveness. According to the US Embassy and defense attache reporting, the prolonged conflict has inflicted heavy losses on the Army especially among junior officers and senior NCOs, and, as a result, leadership, maintenance, and training have suffered. The US defense attache in Khartoum also believes that morale within Ethiopia's northern Army has declined, although not to the level of the mid-1970s when mutinies were a common occurrence in Eritrea. He further states that there have been some localized mutinies and several petitions from the north demanding an end to the fighting and better conditions for the troops. [redacted]

Mengistu and his senior commanders are sensitive to the threat posed to the regime by military unrest and make extensive use of a network of political commissars throughout the armed forces to detect signs of dissent, according to the US Embassy. At times the regime has reacted quickly to restore order by executing ringleaders; on other occasions, they have met some of the demands put to them, such as providing increased pay, and deferring action on others. Thus far, these methods have enabled the regime to keep the Army in line. [redacted]

Late last year, dissatisfaction over the course of the northern campaigns led to coup plotting by some senior military and security officials, including members of Mengistu's inner circle, according to several

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US Embassy sources. The nascent plot, the first serious threat to Mengistu since he took power in 1977, stemmed from the military's concern over declining military morale and the heavy casualties suffered in continuous combat, and was triggered by Mengistu's plans for another offensive, according to the Embassy. These issues also fueled the plotters' disillusionment over the pervasive Soviet influence within the military and resentment over Cuba's unwillingness to commit forces to the counterinsurgency efforts. [redacted]

Mengistu successfully preempted the threat, in our view, by postponing his plans for an offensive and instituting a number of training and personnel measures—such as small unit operations and increased recruitment—long sought by his military chiefs. We also believe that he supported a Cuban troop reduction in Ethiopia in an effort to defuse further the situation. [redacted]

In our opinion, the inability of the plotters to formulate an alternative policy for dealing with the rebellions also contributed to their decision not to move. [redacted] all of the plotters were committed to a unified Ethiopian state. Some of the conspirators, however, had been involved in government-sponsored negotiations with the insurgents, according to [redacted] Eritrean spokesmen, and they probably realized that a political settlement was unlikely as long as the EPLF demanded independence or elections supervised by third parties. [redacted]

Economic Losses

The economic cost of the insurgencies, in our opinion, has been limited by the confinement of the fighting to areas relatively unimportant to the national economy.⁷ Nonetheless, we estimate that costs directly attributable to the fighting probably have totaled roughly \$3 billion since 1974—almost twice the amount of official development assistance received during the same period from OECD countries. This sum includes

⁷ The major growing regions for foodgrains and for coffee—which traditionally has accounted for about three-fifths of all export earnings—are in the central and southwestern areas of Ethiopia. In addition, although some of the small manufacturing sector is located in Asmara, most industrial activity occurs around Addis Ababa. [redacted]

government defense and refugee expenses, and production losses in commerce, agriculture, and industry. We believe agricultural and industrial output has been particularly hard hit by transportation disruptions of needed inputs and final products. In addition, the indirect economic costs of fighting include reduced business confidence, capital flight, the need to cut planned development expenditures to help pay for defense, and the government's inability to concentrate its energies on economic problems. Some of these indirect costs, particularly capital flight and changes in business confidence, may have declined over time as the region has adjusted to a war footing. [redacted]

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We estimate that government spending accounts for almost three-fourths of the total direct cost of the insurgencies. Our calculations, based on official budget statistics, indicate that military spending attributable to the northern insurgencies has totaled at least \$1.7 billion since 1974, with extrabudgetary expenditures—particularly during the heavy fighting of the mid-to-late 1970s—possibly adding several hundreds of millions of dollars more to the price tag.⁸ In addition, the government has attempted to increase development spending in the northern area; two years ago, for example, the regime budgeted approximately \$90 million as part of the Red Star campaign, according to US Embassy reporting. We believe, however, that most of the funds were never disbursed because of the failure of the Army to crush the insurgency. Addis Ababa also has provided limited funding to help cover the food and housing requirements of the hundreds of thousands of people in this region displaced by drought and combat; almost all of the costs involved, however, have been covered by aid donors.⁹ [redacted]

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Production losses, defined as the shortfall between potential output and actual reported output, have added to the bill. Commerce and agriculture have

⁸ Budgeted defense expenditures have remained high since the late 1970s as the regime has concentrated more of its troops and materiel in the north. [redacted]

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⁹ Last year alone, according to preliminary figures released by the United Nations, aid donors contributed some \$90 million in food aid and cash grants to help refugees located all over the country. We are unable, however, to break out either aid directed solely to Eritrean and Tigrean refugees, or assistance aimed only at victims of insurgency rather than drought. [redacted]

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suffered the most damage. On the basis of national trends during 1961-75 and our estimate of the northern region's share of domestic commerce, we estimate that domestic trade and transportation in Eritrea and Tigray have fallen as much as \$450 million below potential levels since 1975, and we believe much of the loss can be attributed to the insurgencies. Moreover, this total does not include ripple effects that have hit other economic sectors in Eritrea and Tigray.

The insurgency has hit the agricultural sector. We think commercial and export crops grown in the northern region—mostly oilseeds, but also cotton, pulses, fruits, and vegetables—have been particularly affected. According to our estimates, derived from comparing Ethiopia's average exports in 1971-74 with sales during the following years, national exports of these crops have dropped almost three-fifths by volume since the early 1970s, costing the government some \$700 million in lost foreign exchange earnings. We believe most of this loss is attributable to production shortfalls in the northern region caused, in part, by insurgent operations that have intimidated and dislocated workers, damaged agricultural equipment and crops, and reduced access to inputs and markets because of transport bottlenecks. Other factors unrelated to the insurgencies—especially the recurrent drought and soil erosion—also have significantly reduced regional productivity. In addition, grain production has lagged although we believe the drought was primarily responsible.

Our calculations, based on changes in the northern region's share of national industrial output over the past decade, indicate that insurgency-related production losses in Eritrea's small industrial sector—manufacturing, handicrafts, and small industry—probably total less than \$100 million since 1974, an amount probably far less than the impact of disruption caused by the economic policies followed during this time. The insurgents have reduced local production directly by disrupting transportation and sabotaging electric plants, and indirectly by driving the government to military conscription that results in labor shortages, particularly in rural areas. There has been little impact on Ethiopia's export earnings, however, since almost all industrial production in Eritrea and Tigray is for the domestic market.

Although the northern insurgencies have contributed to the regime's increasingly tight financial bind, we believe the economic burdens in themselves are unlikely to turn Mengistu away from his resolve to pursue military victory. Faced with a heavy defense load and insufficient revenues—in part because of reduced tax collection and increased smuggling in the northern provinces—the government has pared planned nonmilitary spending and stepped up domestic and foreign borrowing. This strategy already is weakening the base for future economic growth and has led, since 1980 alone, to a doubling of Addis Ababa's external debt servicing costs to the West. Moreover, even though Western donors have helped ease the government's financial plight by extending roughly \$250 million annually in official aid in recent years, foreign exchange reserves have fallen so low that Addis Ababa may be reappraising its stand against approaching the IMF for balance-of-payments support.

Prospects and Implications

We believe there is little likelihood of a military or political solution to either of the northern insurgencies for the next two years. In Eritrea, the EPLF almost certainly will maintain its capability to achieve tactical victories by carefully choosing its targets, but the government's military superiority—and Moscow's support—will keep the Eritreans from achieving their goal of independence. We agree with the US Embassy that Addis Ababa will launch another major offensive within the next six months and probably will recapture some of the area lost earlier this year. According to EPLF spokesmen, for example, Teseney is not defensible and they plan to withdraw from the town if the Ethiopians attack it. At the same time, however, the tenacity of the insurgents, their support from the population, and the large areas of difficult terrain favoring the guerrillas will prevent Addis Ababa from crushing the insurgency, even if it should capture the rebel stronghold at the town of Nak'fa.

On the basis of Soviet support to date, Moscow appears to be determined to stay the course. The Soviets probably are concerned that the loss of Eritrea

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might cause the Mengistu regime to collapse, threaten Moscow's position in Ethiopia, and damage Soviet credibility among other clients. [redacted]

The Soviets probably will continue to search for a political formula that appeals to both sides, but Addis Ababa's uncompromising stance and the complete domination of the Eritrean rebellion by the hardline EPLF argues against any political accommodation. An EPLF spokesman reports the leadership of the guerrilla group firmly believes victory is possible and has rejected repeatedly Soviet-designed settlement terms that might appeal to the central government. We do not believe the EPLF or any other Eritrean faction would accept an offer that does not at a minimum include a referendum supervised by third parties, which almost certainly would favor Eritrean independence. [redacted]

In Tigray, we envision a continuing military stalemate with little or no prospect for a major breakthrough by either side. Moreover, Mengistu's failure to understand that there are differences between the Eritrean and the Tigrean rebellions and his commitment to a strong centralized regime in Addis Ababa appear to rule out any political solution. [redacted]

We believe, however, that Mengistu's continuing failure to suppress the northern insurgencies poses little direct threat to Ethiopia's political stability. Although the military and the government differ on tactics for fighting the conflict, as long as Mengistu continues to accede to their desires by improving training and tactics before launching another major offensive, we see little likelihood they will move against him over this issue. [redacted]

A continuing stalemate has impact beyond Ethiopia's borders. At a minimum Addis Ababa probably will continue to blame Sudan for its problems in the north and may even choose to escalate its assistance to anti-Nimeiri rebels that operate in southern Sudan. If so, Khartoum would look to the United States for increased military aid to combat this threat. The situation could become further inflamed—as it has in the past—by inadvertent clashes between Ethiopian and Sudanese forces along the border or Ethiopian air attacks against Eritrean base camps located in Sudan. [redacted]

The northern insurgencies probably will continue to frustrate US interest in reducing or eliminating the Soviet presence in Ethiopia, since they ensure that Ethiopia will continue to seek weapons and advisers from Moscow. Even in the unlikely event that the Mengistu government falls as a result of serious defeats or war weariness in some quarters of the military, a successor government would be likely to continue efforts to retain Ethiopia's territorial integrity. Thus, even a pro-Western junta would find it difficult to break with the Soviets because of its need for arms to combat the insurgents. [redacted]

In addition, the United States might become the target of a more hostile Ethiopian policy. According to the US Embassy, Mengistu and other senior Ethiopian leaders believe the United States is involved in supporting the northern insurgents. Continued successful operations by the rebels would cause the Mengistu government to look for ways to retaliate for this perceived US activity, either directly by breaking relations or striking at US targets, or indirectly by increasing military pressure on Sudan and Somalia, countries friendly to the United States. In either case, US interests in the region would be jeopardized as Addis Ababa searches for scapegoats in frustration over its inability to suppress its northern insurgencies. [redacted]

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Appendix

The Northern Insurgent Groups

Eritrea Province

The Eritrean liberation movement is split into three main factions by ideological, religious, and personal rivalries. These divisions are deep rooted and have frustrated several efforts by Saudi Arabia and Sudan over the past 10 years to unify the Eritreans. Factional resentment over the political and military domination of the movement since 1981 by the hardline Eritrean People's Liberation Front makes unification—or even cooperation by the factions—unlikely even in the long term. [redacted]

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front

The Marxist and largely Christian EPLF split from the Eritrean Liberation Front in the early 1970s. At that time, the organizers of the EPLF openly criticized the ELF's espousal of Pan-Arab and Muslim goals rather than Marxist ideals. For several years thereafter, the EPLF was engaged in combat with the other Eritrean factions, especially the ELF, which it finally defeated in the summer of 1981. [redacted]

Academic studies and press reports indicate that, although the EPLF is pragmatic in its application of Marxism in areas under its control, ideological concerns are important to its leaders and cadre—a group coming primarily from the politicized urban areas of the province. Many were students in Western Europe, especially Italy, and the movement has close ties with several European Socialist and Communist parties, according to their own propaganda and academic studies. In addition, some senior officers have stated that they received military and ideological training in the People's Republic of China in the late 1960s. [redacted]

The EPLF is the most hardline Eritrean group in negotiating with the Ethiopian Government. Its leaders consistently have rejected Addis Ababa's offers of autonomy for the province, insisting that unconditional Ethiopian acceptance of Eritrean independence is the only basis for a political settlement, according to press releases and public policy statements. [redacted]

The Eritrean Liberation Front

The ELF originally was almost exclusively Muslim, reflecting its formation in 1962 in opposition to the absorption of Eritrea by Christian-dominated Ethiopia. Eventually, it attracted a sizable number of Christians who were alienated by former Emperor Haile Selassie's repressive policies in the province. Although the ELF attempted to be a loosely structured, umbrella organization, encompassing different religious and ideological beliefs, factional infighting between Muslims and Christians, and Marxists and conservatives, soon emerged. [redacted]

Our analysis of contemporary accounts suggests the rapid decline of the ELF between 1978 and 1981 stemmed from several factors:

- Its armed units suffered heavy casualties in fighting with the Ethiopian Army during Addis Ababa's major offensive in 1978.
- A power struggle in 1980 between the conservative-moderate faction and leftist opponents paralyzed the leadership and prompted many ELF members to switch to other Eritrean factions.
- The ELF's forces were evicted from the province and most of its weapons seized by Sudan after the group's defeat by the EPLF in 1981.
- Support from its traditional Arab backers, such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, declined as a result of the movement's unilateral meetings with Soviet and Ethiopian representatives to discuss peace options. [redacted]

The ELF has splintered into several factions and probably retains fewer than 5,000 troops—very few of whom are located in Eritrea Province. Although Sudan recently returned to the ELF some of the arms

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it confiscated from the group three years ago and Saudi Arabia provides financial aid, the organization appears demoralized and engages in little military activity, according to Embassy and defense attache reporting. [redacted]

The Eritrean Liberation Front/Popular Liberation Forces

This faction was formed by longtime Eritrean spokesman Osman Saleh Sabbe after his expulsion in 1976 from the EPLF. Its published propaganda indicates an appeal to conservative Muslims, but it has only a few hundred troops. We believe the faction is little more than an extension of its colorful leader. Despite this, Sabbe has been able to acquire large amounts of money and equipment as a result of his personal contacts with Arab leaders and his reputation outside Ethiopia as a spokesman for the Eritrean cause. [redacted]

We believe the ELF/PLF, however, has not developed a strong following among Eritreans because Sabbe has focused his efforts on generating support abroad rather than developing an internal organizational structure. Most of Sabbe's followers are recruited from Eritrean refugee camps in Sudan. It has conducted few operations inside Ethiopia since its forces were driven out in 1979 after extensive fighting with the ELF—generated by Sabbe's attempts to recruit ELF members. Neither the EPLF nor the ELF accept Sabbe's group as an equal, and their leadership considers him an opportunist. [redacted]

Tigray Province

The Tigreans, largely Christian peasants, share a common cultural and religious heritage with Ethiopia's dominant Amhara ethnic group. For centuries the Tigrean and Amhara royal houses vied for control of the country and recognition as the legitimate defender of Ethiopian culture and Coptic Christian orthodoxy. [redacted]

The collapse of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime in 1974 weakened central government control of the countryside, and prompted a renewal of Tigrean

nationalism that had been dormant since the 1940s, when a short-lived rebellion was suppressed by the central government with British military assistance.

[redacted]

This postrevolution rebirth culminated in the formation of the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in March 1975. Our analysis of US defense attache and Embassy reporting leads us to believe that the Tigrean movement grew slowly at first, primarily because of competition within the province from other groups on the left and right. According to academic works and journalist reports, the TPLF gradually absorbed the smaller Tigrean resistance forces and defeated rival non-Tigrean guerrillas. [redacted]

The TPLF increased significantly in size and strength following its alliance in 1978 with the EPLF. The relationship between the leadership of the TPLF and the EPLF is based on ideological compatibility and, to some extent, a common Coptic Christian heritage. The relationship gives the TPLF access to EPLF arms and training, supplementing the weapons it captures from the Ethiopian Army. In addition, the TPLF gains valuable experience in more conventional fighting by occasionally participating in joint operations with EPLF units. [redacted]

The TPLF leadership originally was dominated by Marxist nationalists from the urban areas, although more conservative, less doctrinaire figures may have assumed some leadership positions in recent years as the organization has expanded to include more conservative elements. This shift probably reflects the increasing numbers of conservative Christians who have joined the TPLF. In an effort to broaden the appeal to these elements, we believe the TPLF leadership has downplayed ideology, stressing instead the historical appeal of Tigrean nationalism and the threat posed to the traditional Tigrean social structure by Addis Ababa's internal socialist policies. [redacted]

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