

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

11 February 1980

MEMORANDUM

CURRENT TRENDS IN SOVIET-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS

Summary

The USSR almost certainly hopes that its paramount position in Ethiopia will facilitate the spread of Soviet influence elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East. Moscow thus sees Ethiopia as a valuable, although not necessarily vital, strategic asset that partially offsets its losses in Egypt and Somalia. [redacted]

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Moscow has sought to insure the survival of the Mengistu regime and extend Soviet influence over it by supplying Addis Ababa with advisers and selected military equipment and helping the Ethiopians against the Eritreans--including the planning and overseeing, and perhaps even the direction of Ethiopian tactical operations. [redacted]

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A major political aim of Soviet policy in Ethiopia has been to create a vanguard Marxist party through which Moscow could institutionalize the role of political elements favorably inclined toward Moscow and insure the permanence of its own influence in Addis. Mengistu, however, has only grudgingly moved

This memorandum was written by [redacted] USSR-EE Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was requested by Paul Henze, NSC Staff and was coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research Office of Economic Research and the National Intelligence Officer for Africa. Research was completed on 8 February 1980. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Soviet External Branch, OPA/USSR-EE [redacted]

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in this direction. Other strains in Soviet-Ethiopian relations include Soviet urgings that Addis find a political solution to the Eritrean war and friction over the adequacy of Soviet military and economic aid. [redacted]

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Soviet, Cuban, and East German objectives in Ethiopia are closely complementary. The Soviets underwrite the costs of the Cuban military commitment. The East Germans provide technical assistance [redacted]

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For the foreseeable future, Moscow will continue to provide military support for Ethiopia in Eritrea and the Ogaden, despite its reservations over some of Addis' tactics. Moscow will continue to try to tighten the Mengistu regime's political hold on the country. In doing so, it will also try to strengthen its influence over the government. [redacted]

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Moscow probably sees closer ties with Ethiopia as a useful counter to an expanded US presence in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean. Closer Soviet relations with Addis can also be an important source of pressure on other nations in the region, especially the Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti. [redacted]

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The USSR and Ethiopia: An Update

Despite occasional differences between Moscow and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia remains the focus of Soviet policy in East Africa. Moscow hopes to consolidate the Mengistu regime's hold on power and insure that the USSR remains the dominant foreign influence in Ethiopia. In the longer term, the Soviets probably see their position in Ethiopia as a key element in their efforts to enhance their position in the Red Sea region and sub-Saharan Africa. [redacted]

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Over the last two years the general thrust of Soviet policy has been to insure that the Mengistu regime and a unified Ethiopia survive. At the same time, the Soviets have attempted to transform what could best be called a marriage of convenience into a more lasting relationship through the institutionalization of Moscow's role in Ethiopian military and political affairs. [redacted]

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Expanding Soviet Military Role

Much of Moscow's energy has been directed at supporting Ethiopia's military campaigns in the Ogaden and Eritrea. Although scattered fighting persists in the Ogaden and apparently still requires the presence of large numbers of Cuban troops, Soviet attention has centered on Eritrea for more than a year. To a great degree this has been the result of Addis' refusal to accept anything less than a military solution to the Eritrean problem. For some time the Soviets have urged the Ethiopians to seek a negotiated settlement and have advocated a vaguely defined federation in which Eritrea would presumably enjoy considerable autonomy.

[REDACTED]

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Given Addis' resistance to a political settlement, the Soviets have had little choice but to aid Ethiopian efforts to achieve a military solution. This, in turn, has led to a growing Soviet advisory role in the fighting.

[REDACTED]

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Soviet Efforts to Consolidate the Revolution

The Soviets and their East German allies have encouraged Mengistu to channel the Ethiopian revolution along increasingly Marxist lines. Moscow's goal is to formalize Ethiopia's ideological identification with the USSR and to institutionalize those political elements oriented toward Moscow.

[REDACTED]

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Moscow's primary interest is the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist political party in Ethiopia. Such a party would broaden the base of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) beyond the military and help perpetuate Moscow's influence. Moscow has long been uncomfortable with its reliance on a military junta and has for some time urged creation of such a party.

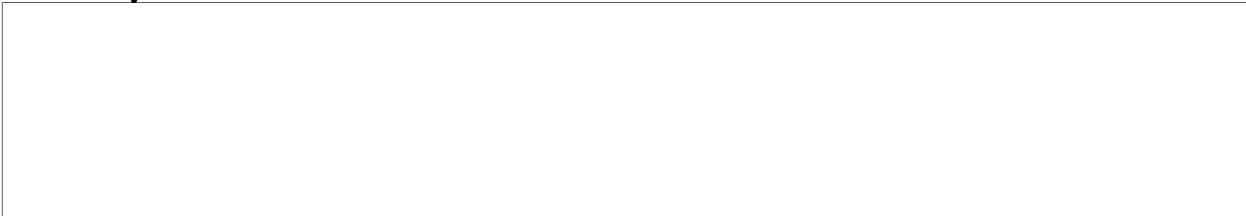
[REDACTED]

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As early as the fall of 1978, there were indications that the USSR was impatient with Ethiopian foot dragging on this issue.

[REDACTED]

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No progress was seen until Kosygin's trip to Ethiopia in September 1979. At that time, Mengistu stated that a commission to study the creation of a party would soon be formed; its establishment was finally announced in December.



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According to a US Embassy source, the formation of such a commission was Moscow's price for further military assistance in Eritrea. The Soviets are still apparently unhappy with the pace of progress, however; as recently as 19 January, a Soviet broadcast reiterated the need for creating a "vanguard party" in Ethiopia.

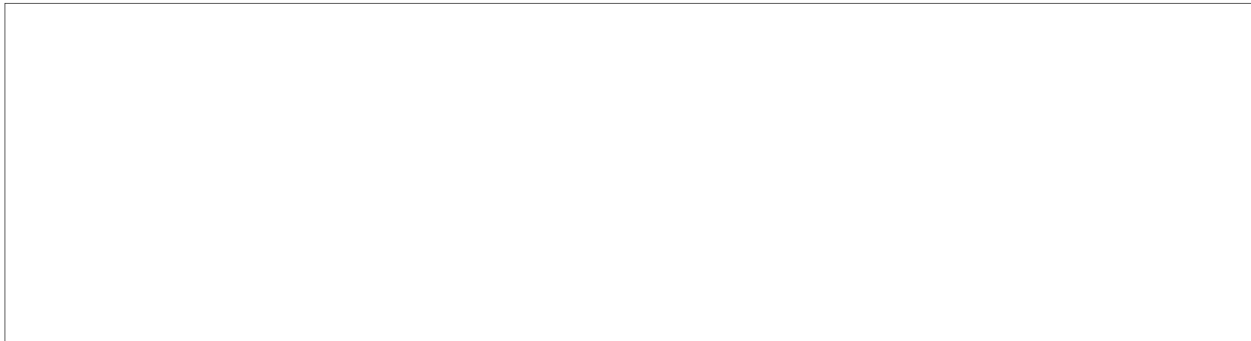


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Ethiopian reluctance to move quickly on this issue is probably the result of PMAC fears of losing power to a civilian establishment. Ethiopian leaders, including Mengistu, may also be suspicious of Soviet intentions. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan may have sharpened Mengistu's concerns about the risks entailed in a close Soviet embrace (the Ethiopians, however, have supported the Soviet action in international forums).



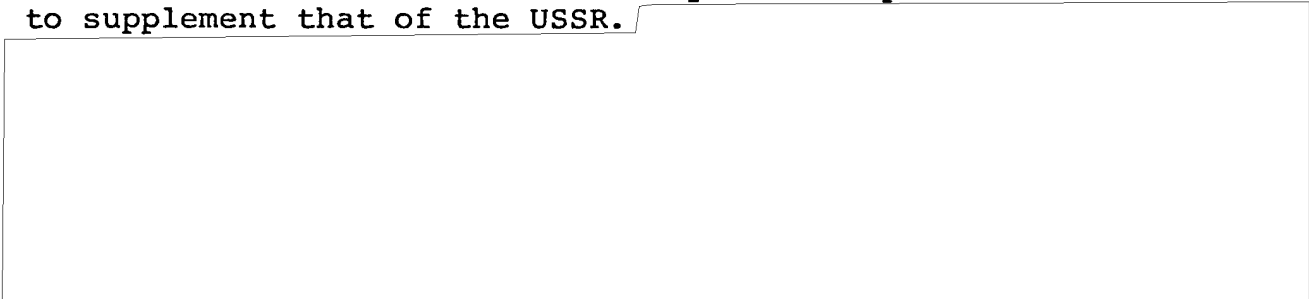
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East German and Cuban Cooperation

East German and Cuban activity in Ethiopia continues to supplement that of the USSR.



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The East Germans may also have helped the Ethiopians frame their "voluntary" agricultural collectivization program. The Ethiopian Government probably will press to insure the program's success, primarily through land reform and the granting of aid to collectives in an effort to make them more attractive than private operations. [REDACTED]

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Prospects for continued close cooperation between Addis and Havana are good. Over the next few years Cuba, in conjunction with its Soviet allies, will try to safeguard its investment in the future of Marxism in Ethiopia. In mid-December 1979, Cuba and Ethiopia signed a protocol on economic cooperation in which Cuba agreed to help reorganize Ethiopia's Ministry of Mines as well as provide assistance in energy and water resource projects. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

We estimate that approximately 13,000 Cuban combat troops are currently stationed in Ethiopia. They are mainly located in the Ogaden and near the Somali border. A significant reduction is unlikely in the near future. Cuba also aids Ethiopia in health, agriculture, intelligence, and a variety of other areas, including the provision of training for 2,300 Ethiopian students in Cuba. [REDACTED]

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Friction Over Military and Economic Assistance

Like many other Third World recipients of Soviet military aid, the Ethiopians have complained of the cost of maintenance and the scarcity of spare parts. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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Differences have also arisen over economic aid. During Kosygin's September visit, Moscow reportedly promised aid for a number of projects including a cement plant near Dire Dawa. Soviet aid promises, however, apparently fell far short of what the Ethiopians sought. Moscow, for example, refused to help construct an oil refinery at Mojo, arguing that present refinery capacity was more than adequate to meet Ethiopia's needs. Although the Soviets have taken over a European Community agricultural project, they have refused to finance several other projects that had been under consideration by various West European governments.

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In addition, the Ethiopians have claimed the Soviets are buying Ethiopian coffee well below the market price. For its part Moscow has publicly described Ethiopian economic planning as inadequate.

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While they are reluctant to commit many rubles to economic development, the Soviets have enthusiastically pursued other activities designed to strengthen ties with Ethiopia. Hardly a week has gone by in which a Soviet, Cuban, or East European delegation has not visited Addis. The visit last November of East German party chief Honecker, for example, resulted in the signing of a treaty of friendship and cooperation. With the exception of its accords with Mozambique and India, East Germany has signed such agreements only with socialist bloc countries. In addition, from 27 October to 25 November, no less than 33 cultural, sport, technical, and economic cooperation visits were conducted, including the dispatch of a group of Ethiopian students to Cuba.

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Prospects

For the foreseeable future, much of the Soviet effort in Ethiopia will be directed at insuring the Mengistu regime's hold on the country. While the Soviets may still seek some sort of negotiated settlement to the Eritrean problem, they will almost certainly continue to provide the central government with the means to pursue a military solution. There are currently 1,000 Soviet Military Advisers in Ethiopia; given continued fighting in Eritrea, there is little chance

this number will decline. Should the Ogaden or Tigre situation heat up, the Soviet advisory mission might be expanded. [redacted]

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If a Marxist political party is formed, Moscow probably will try to increase its influence in the civilian side of the government as well. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviets will probably try to place additional advisers in the ministries much as it did in Somalia, Angola, and Afghanistan. [redacted]

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The Soviets will continue to view their relations with Ethiopia in the context of broader strategic and regional considerations. They probably are pleased with the success of their efforts to create an interlocking network of friendship and cooperation treaties between the USSR, East Germany, Ethiopia, and South Yemen. They must be further gratified by their success in securing a presence on the eastern end of the Red Sea. [redacted]

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Should the US increase its presence in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviets will probably seek greater use of ports both in Ethiopia and South Yemen. The harbor on Dahlak Island which the Soviets have improved and used for occasional naval port calls, could be particularly useful. In any case, Moscow's stake in Ethiopia is bound to grow. Ultimately, the Soviets probably see their ties to Ethiopia as a means of influencing or exerting leverage on other states in the region, particularly the Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti. Should Somali President Siad succeed in gaining significant US support, Moscow would probably encourage Ethiopia to increase pressure on his regime through the training and infiltration of Somali dissidents. Similarly, increased US naval use of Djibouti could lead Moscow and Addis to increase their contacts with anti-US elements there. [redacted]

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In the longer term, Moscow may view Ethiopia as a valuable asset not only in the Horn but throughout sub-Saharan Africa as well. Given Mengistu's revolutionary pretensions and traditional Ethiopian foreign policy aims, Addis would be a willing ally and partner. Ethiopia has already trained Rhodesian Patriotic Front guerrillas and suggested that it sees a larger role for itself in southern Africa. Any such entrance onto a larger stage, however, will have to await pacification at home. [redacted]

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Relations

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