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Ethiopia: Institutionalizing a Marxist-Leninist State

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An Intelligence Assessment

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*ALA 86-10011
April 1986*

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Ethiopia: Institutionalizing a Marxist-Leninist State

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Office of African and Latin American Analysis, with
biographic contributions by [redacted]
Office of Central Reference. It was coordinated with
the Directorate of Operations. [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
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Ethiopia: Institutionalizing a Marxist-Leninist State

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 4 March 1986
was used in this report.*

Chairman Mengistu has evolved since the 1974 revolution from an opportunistic young military officer bent on seizing absolute political power into a dedicated Marxist-Leninist who has made Ethiopia one of the Soviet Union's staunchest Third World clients. To facilitate the formation of a full-fledged Marxist regime, he has created a vanguard Workers Party, launched an ambitious program of agricultural collectivization, and expanded the role of the state and the party across the spectrum of political, economic, and social institutions.

Although Addis Ababa remains heavily dependent on Western economic aid and famine assistance, we believe efforts by the United States and other Western nations to reverse this political process and reduce the dominant Soviet influence in Ethiopia will have little success as long as Mengistu remains in power. Reporting from the US Embassy [redacted] [redacted] leads us to believe that Mengistu and most senior Ethiopian military and party leaders harbor a deep distrust of the West and believe the United States in particular is actively involved in subverting the regime. We expect the government to continue its efforts to weaken remaining Western influence by shifting its bilateral economic and trade ties to the Communist Bloc—as evidenced by Ethiopia's unsuccessful effort to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA) last year—and will remain impervious to Western charges of human rights abuse. We believe Mengistu also will attempt to take a more active role in African affairs so as to enhance his image as an African spokesman, cultivate his role as a Marxist leader, and prove his value to Moscow while attempting to frustrate US policy goals.

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We believe the centerpiece of Mengistu's program to transform Ethiopia into a Marxist-Leninist state is the Ethiopian Workers Party (WPE), established in September 1984. Its structure is clearly modeled after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Moscow played a key role in creating its structure and policies, according to US Embassy reporting. The Embassy further reports, and we agree, that the WPE has increased its power over the past year, and has assumed the role of watchdog in all government ministries and political institutions. Party officials, for example, dominate famine relief operations and the resettlement program, which are key to Mengistu's drive to collectivize agriculture.

In addition to the WPE, Mengistu continues to rely on other institutions to facilitate the transformation of the country and to strengthen his personal control. For example, he employs a pervasive military commissar system

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both to help indoctrinate troops in Marxism and to watch for signs of disloyalty. the commissars have significant power and even have been known to interfere in military operations. In the urban areas, the regime uses a system of neighborhood associations, called *kebeles*, to organize, politicize, and control the population. Although the *kebeles* predate Mengistu's assumption of power, he has expanded their powers, and, together with party cadres, they now have wide-ranging political and security functions.

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Addis Ababa has seized upon the recent famine and drought crises to accelerate the collectivization of agriculture. In our view, this program is one of Mengistu's highest priorities in institutionalizing the revolution. According to the US Embassy, he considers it the only way both to improve agricultural production and to control the independent-minded peasantry. Despite the use of seed, fertilizer, and mechanization as inducements, the tradition-bound Ethiopian peasantry continues to resist the collectivization drive. Six years after the introduction of collectivization, approximately 90 percent of Ethiopia's agriculture remains in private hands.

We believe that in the near term Marxism-Leninism is likely to remain a fragile and alien system in Ethiopia. The population at large remains unreceptive to indoctrination and, as the US Embassy note, shows little enthusiasm for the regime, its Marxist-Leninist policies and institutions, and its Soviet patrons.

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The coup in South Yemen and the resultant strains in Ethiopian-Soviet relations probably will set back efforts by radical ideologues, long supported by the Soviet Union within the WPE and its Politburo, to play a more active role in formulating and implementing policy. US Embassy reporting indicates that Mengistu strongly resents Moscow's pressure on him to cease his support to former PDRY President Hasani, a longtime ally and friend, and the coup renewed his concern over the threat the radicals pose to him. Mengistu probably believes Moscow had some hand in the coup, and he can be expected to monitor closely the ideologues within his regime, limit their contacts with the Soviets, and rely more on his military to protect him from any plots. In our opinion, however, Mengistu is unlikely to alter his efforts to install Marxism-Leninism in the country because of his deep belief in its benefits.

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In the unlikely event Mengistu were overthrown by the Army, we believe a successor military regime might move to eliminate or at least reduce the influence of Marxist-Leninist institutions in an effort to attract Western economic support, and to rally domestic political support. In this case, we think Moscow would probably have to acquiesce to these moves in the short term—especially if Mengistu were killed—while calculating that it could gradually win over the new regime through the provision of military equipment. In our view, Ethiopian security interests, real and perceived, will all but guarantee Moscow a high degree of political leverage with almost any new regime that wields power in Addis Ababa.

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Ethiopia: Institutionalizing a Marxist-Leninist State

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Introduction

Ethiopia has become one of the Soviet Union's staunchest Third World allies under the one-man rule of Chairman Mengistu Haile-Mariam—a principal figure in the ousting of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. The record to date shows that Mengistu has evolved into a dedicated Marxist, who embraces the Soviet model and is convinced that it is the key to ending Ethiopia's backwardness as well as a means to solidify his personal power. Among the five self-professed Marxist states in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia under Mengistu has gone furthest in pursuing Marxist ideological goals, even at times when it has threatened to undermine Mengistu's hold on power. This Intelligence Assessment examines structures already in place and those being planned as Mengistu moves toward institutionalizing a Marxist-Leninist regime. The paper briefly evaluates the widespread but fragmented opposition to the regime and examines Soviet attitudes toward its steadfast client state. Finally, this assessment addresses prospects for Mengistu's effort to copy the Soviet model and weighs implications of these developments for the United States.

An analysis of Mengistu's career indicates that his strong attraction to Marxism developed in late 1975, when he formed a close relationship with the French-educated Marxist intellectual Haile Fida, one of the civilian advisers to the revolutionary military council. In April 1976, Mengistu publicly proclaimed himself a Marxist and called for "the complete elimination of feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, and imperialism from the country . . . and for a transition toward socialism." By 1978, he began identifying himself as a Communist in his speeches and called for the creation of a Communist society within Ethiopia.

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We believe Mengistu's devotion to Marxism is reflected in and demonstrated by the many Soviet-style political and economic policies his government has pursued:

- Political commissars have been imposed on the Ethiopian military at all levels, despite opposition from most field commanders.
- Mengistu formed a Marxist-Leninist workers party over considerable opposition from many senior military officers who view it as a threat to their power.
- Mengistu continues to pursue agricultural collectivization and resettlement programs despite significant human costs and adverse international reactions.

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The Development of an Ideologue

Since the 1974 Ethiopian revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, we have become more convinced that Mengistu Haile-Mariam has moved from a leftist opportunist intent only on acquiring power, to a committed Marxist and one of the Soviet Union's most loyal Third World clients. This transformation, in our view, accelerated after he became the undisputed head of the military government in February 1977 by purging and outmaneuvering his political opponents and rivals.

Mengistu shows little inclination to alter these policies, despite evidence that several of them have not worked and instead have fanned domestic opposition. Recent US Embassy reporting indicates that Mengistu now plans to hasten the introduction of Marxist policies into other areas of public life over the next two to three years.

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Creating a New State

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Mengistu's political transformation was hastened by the appeal of a readymade and clear-cut ideology, the influence wielded on him by a coterie of Ethiopian civilian Marxists, and Soviet efforts to court the Ethiopian leader.

Chairman Mengistu, in our view, remains committed to creating a Marxist society in Ethiopia and intends drastically to alter the country's political, economic, and social institutions. According to US Embassy

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analysis and Mengistu's speeches, he believes the Soviet system provides a model for Ethiopia to overcome its backwardness, end its endemic insurgencies, and, at the same time, justify the concentration of power in Addis Ababa. [REDACTED]

US Embassy reporting suggests Mengistu is intent on aligning the country's economy with the Soviet Bloc, while loosening bilateral economic and trade ties to the West. Last summer, according to US Embassy sources, he made a determined effort to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA) despite the prospect of losing badly needed Western economic aid, which [REDACTED]

totaled roughly \$1.5 billion over the past 10 years. In our view, Mengistu probably calculated that political as well as economic gains from joining CEMA would compensate for lost Western assistance, as well as allow him to do away with what he views as Western interference in his efforts to revamp the Ethiopian economy. [REDACTED]

The Ethiopian Workers Party

The formation of the Ethiopian Workers Party (WPE) in September 1984 capped a 10-year debate over the need for and composition of a political party in

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Ethiopia. According to US Embassy reporting and several academic studies, many members of the military council—including initially Mengistu—and other senior officers opposed the creation of a civilian-based Marxist-Leninist party:

- Many officers viewed the revolution as their own and themselves as the vanguard of social change; they believed that a civilian party would not only force the military out of politics but also jeopardize revolutionary gains that had been made.

- Many of these nationalistic senior military and security officers also feared that a civilian party could be more readily subverted by the Soviet Union, allowing Moscow to further strengthen its hold on Ethiopia.

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Soon after Mengistu consolidated his position in 1977, US Embassy and academic sources indicated that the Soviets stepped up the pressure on him to create a

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civilian-based vanguard party in Ethiopia. For example, several Soviet polemicists stressed the need for a party in Ethiopia to institutionalize the gains of the revolution and to provide proper guidance to the population. US Embassy reporting indicated that high-level Soviet visitors to Addis Ababa frequently stressed in their speeches the need to create such an institution and to bring civilians into Ethiopia's decisionmaking bodies. []

In December 1979, Mengistu—probably to deflect Soviet criticism over the slow pace of organizing a Marxist party—publicly announced the formation of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE), a body that resembled and functioned as a political party. COPWE was basically an appendage of the ruling military council, and a review of its leadership revealed that Mengistu and his military supporters held every key position. They skillfully used the organization to lay the foundation for the future party. According to the US Embassy and several academic works, membership in COPWE was closely controlled and designed to ensure that the new party would pose little threat to the regime. []

The long-awaited Ethiopian Workers Party was announced in September 1984 after almost five years of development. According to the Embassy, Mengistu dominates the WPE through an 11-man Politburo that includes six of his longtime military associates and four civilians. Two of the officers and two of the civilians on the Politburo are Marxist ideologues, according to the US Embassy. Because Mengistu believes that the military alone is capable of leading a Marxist revolution, we believe the inclusion of the civilians is an effort to appease the Soviets. Nonetheless, we believe that Mengistu focused on the concerns of his military by allowing active duty or former military officers who now hold senior government or key party positions to dominate the WPE's 136-member Central Committee. Ethiopian Government statistics show that approximately 70 percent of the estimated 15,000 party members now belong to the military or are government employees, while only 20 percent are workers and 10 percent are peasants. To date, deference to the military has continued and several civilian officials speaking publicly at a party

congress last year affirmed that the military has a crucial role to play in the "building of socialism" in Ethiopia. []

Over the past year, however, Mengistu has taken several steps to mold the WPE into a more Leninist party. [] Rules of conduct for party members and the operating procedures for the WPE closely parallel those of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Party members are forbidden [] to attend religious services, and strict controls are placed over their personal lives. An examination of the party rules of ethics reveals that the preamble pays homage to the Russian Revolution and is filled with quotations from Lenin. []

The heart of the WPE is the political cadre, who has been indoctrinated in the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and carefully recruited or absorbed from other political groups by the party, according to US Embassy reporting. Although some Ethiopians probably have joined the party for political or economic gain, the US Embassy believes that most rank-and-file members—especially the cadres in the field—are deeply motivated ideologically. Almost all of them have attended the regime's Yekatit Political School and attended lectures by Ethiopian, Soviet, and East European faculty members. We estimate that approximately 15,000 students have undergone ideological training at Yekatit since its formation in 1976. Almost none of the party's political cadres have been exposed to the West, according to US Embassy reporting. []

The WPE cadre plays an important role in the regime's efforts to indoctrinate the population. According to the US Embassy, they conduct discussion clubs that meet at least weekly in all government organizations and private concerns, with attendance by employees mandatory. Cadres are assigned to major secondary schools and the universities to conduct indoctrination and to monitor student conduct. []

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By all accounts the party has acquired increased political power over the past year, and party administrators or cadres frequently wield more control than government bureaucrats. According to the US Embassy, for example, the party is assuming an increasingly visible role of watchdog in all ministries and institutions. This is also the case in famine relief operations, where party officials, according to the US Embassy, are increasingly making the decisions that previously were made by local or central government relief administrators. []

Politicizing the Military

Mengistu almost certainly realizes that military backing is vital to his retention of power and is well aware that it is the only institution capable of ousting him. Based on the record to date, he has put considerable effort into establishing institutions within the armed forces to allow him to inculcate the troops with Marxism-Leninism, build support for the regime and its programs, and to weed out seditious activity. Every military unit has a political commissar and, []

[] many of these individuals are junior officers or enlisted men who have little formal training except for political indoctrination. The commissar program, which was instituted in the mid-1970s, closely resembles the system currently found in Soviet Bloc armies. []

[] the commissars wield significant power, and have access to all military communications and in some cases have the authority to countermand the orders of unit commanders. []

The commissars also play a politicizing role, and hold frequent political meetings for the troops where the tenets of Marxism-Leninism are taught, often using techniques such as movies or "morality plays," []

[] In addition to their training function, commissars also closely monitor the political climate of the units. [] they report signs of disloyalty to the regime and can have a commander replaced or arrested. []

The Kebeles

The regime exercises political control in Ethiopian cities and towns through neighborhood associations called *kebeles*. Membership by the residents is mandatory, according to US Embassy and academic

reporting. *Kebeles* were first established by the military regime in 1975 to carry out its political and economic reform policies in the urban areas and to strengthen control over the population. According to the US Embassy, its leaders are elected by the residents of the neighborhoods, although all candidates are selected by the government. []

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The associations are responsible, according to a US Embassy study, for food distribution, security, and political indoctrination. *Kebele* officials have the power of arrest and certain other limited judicial powers, maintain armed patrols within their areas of jurisdiction, control rationing, and can approve or deny travel requests. Although the *kebeles* are not under party control, they hold periodic meetings where party cadres provide political indoctrination for adults and youths, and attendance is closely monitored. []

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Kebele officials probably serve as an effective deterrent to antiregime sentiment in the cities. The US Embassy reports that armed *kebele* security forces augment government police in putting down local disturbances, tracking down dissidents, and, in some locations, are used to prevent peasants from leaving resettlement camps. []

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Collectivization of Agriculture

Mengistu believes, according to US Embassy reporting, that collectivization of agriculture is an important step in bringing the Ethiopian economy under state control. He therefore made this his first major economic goal after seizing power. In the initial stages the regime moved slowly in its efforts to collectivize the peasantry, especially in the conservative northern provinces. We agree with several academic authors who state that Mengistu was concerned that forceful collectivization at the outset would fuel the insurgencies and drastically reduce agricultural production. []

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According to a government edict published in 1979, the collectivization procedure was to be accomplished gradually, with peasant associations converting into collectives by amalgamating land and giving up old

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The Role of the State in the Economy

The regime has made significant strides in restructuring the economy along socialist lines since the military takeover in 1974. Public utilities, banking, financial institutions, and industry in the relatively small modern industrial sector are under government control. In addition, all rural and urban land as well as housing were nationalized at the time of the announcement of an extensive land reform program in 1975. Collectivization of agriculture was introduced in 1979, and the Embassy estimates that 5 percent of the farms are now collective. []

The US Embassy reports that over 90 percent of major industrial output now comes from the public sector, including textiles, oil refining, food processing, and cement. Freight forwarding has been nationalized and the export trade brought under national control. The government's Agricultural Marketing Corporation will handle approximately 40 percent of all grain sales during the present Ethiopian fiscal year. In addition, the regime's coffee marketing firm controls over 70 percent of total registered coffee sales. The majority of other export commodities, such as hides, skins, and oilseed, are also under government control. []

In January 1983, Addis Ababa issued a joint-venture proclamation in an effort to stimulate foreign investment. A section of the proclamation, however, allows

the government to nationalize any joint venture in the event that such a move is deemed in the national interest. As a result of this and the clear intention of the government to eventually abolish the private sector, long-term investment is almost nonexistent, according to the US Embassy. []

Ethiopia's adherence to Marxist ideology, which has wreaked havoc with its economy, will impede its ability to bounce back from the severe drought and famine. The US Embassy reports that while Addis Ababa's balance-of-payments situation—in decline in recent years—has improved, this is a result of the amount of goods and services purchased by the foreign community engaged in relief operations and is only a temporary situation. At the same time, it masks preliminary reports that indicate a significant decline in agriculture—including coffee, the major export; a small drop in industrial production; and a small growth in the services sector. We believe, based upon US Embassy reporting, that the regime is unlikely to take the measures necessary to revitalize the economy, such as increased price supports to farmers or programs designed to draw more assistance to the private sector. []

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farming implements in favor of mechanization. Current government policy dictates, according to the US Embassy, that collective and state farms receive priority for all government services, including the distribution of fertilizer, improved seeds, extension services, and credit. As a result, we judge government services are not reaching the vast majority of farmers who have not agreed to collectivize. According to government figures and several academic studies, however, this approach has met with limited success and, because of peasant resistance, approximately 90 percent of agriculture remains in private hands. In fact, the regime's own statistics indicate that collective farms are a rarity in the northern provinces of Ethiopia, which account for a substantial amount of the country's agricultural production.

 []

We believe Addis Ababa has seized upon the recent famine and drought crisis to accelerate collectivization. In general the government is attempting to break peasant resistance through a two-prong approach. Some people are being forced to move to newly constructed resettlement camps in other regions of the country—the so-called resettlement program—while other peasants are being moved to newly constructed villages within their regions—a policy referred to as the “villagization” program. Under its resettlement plan, some 1.2 million peasants are slated to be moved

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from the drought and famine ravaged northern provinces to more fertile areas of western and southern Ethiopia.¹ According to Ethiopian officials, the resettlement camps are being organized as collective farms although the settlers are allowed to maintain small family plots. A variety of US Embassy reports leads us to contend that Ethiopian authorities—who have quotas to meet—frequently use force to procure “volunteers” for resettlement despite strong Western objections to such human rights violations. According to the US Embassy, over 600,000 people have been resettled since October 1984. []

Information on conditions in the resettlement camps is spotty, but US Embassy reporting indicates that severe health and logistic problems exist. Western relief and government officials who have visited resettlement areas report that armed guards are used to keep the settlers from leaving and that party cadres closely control visitor access. According to Western observers, many sites are poorly located and lack adequate facilities, logistic support, and health care. [] the initial crop harvest in some camps has been small, raising the prospect of malnutrition, disease, and starvation. We believe the regime has attempted to address some of these issues by slowing the pace of resettlement and sending several thousand students and faculty to the camps to construct housing last summer, but the government has been unable to marshal sufficient resources to support adequately Mengistu's hasty and ill-conceived resettlement plan. []

[] Mengistu plans to move at least 350,000 peasants into over 2,000 new villages during the next two years, and ultimately convert them into collective farms. The “villagization” campaign is intended, [] to move rural inhabitants into newly constructed villages in eastern and central Ethiopia, ostensibly to provide them with better health and educational services. The US Embassy reports, however, that many of the new villages lack basic necessities and suffer from a lack of personnel and equipment to support the new programs “villagization” is intended to provide. []

Mengistu's continued pursuit of collectivization despite its serious problems and bleak prospects for improving Ethiopia's agricultural production is, in our view, another example of his commitment to what he considers Marxist dogma. Although the Soviet Union continues to provide substantial logistic assistance to the resettlement effort and some medical aid in the camps, the US Embassy reports that several Soviet Bloc officials have criticized the program. We believe, based on Mengistu's efforts to develop collective farms exclusively in the resettlement areas, that he continues to believe that agricultural production can only increase through collectivization, where he contends resources can be concentrated and the peasants reeducated both technically and ideologically. The US Embassy notes that to further these goals, as many as 2,000 party cadres are involved in the resettlement program. []

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Heavy Soviet Involvement

The Soviet Union—despite some concern about continued military domination of Ethiopia's political institutions and the regime's misapplication of Marxist-Leninist dogma—continues to make substantial investment in Ethiopia, and appears committed to creating Marxist-Leninist institutions as well as bolstering Mengistu's position in Ethiopia. []

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[] Moscow played a major role in the establishment of the WPE, aiding Addis Ababa in creating the party structure and drawing up its rules and regulations. US Embassy reporting []

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[] indicate that the Soviets are continuing to encourage Mengistu to bring civilians into his ruling circle and expand his support base outside the military. In the same vein, a recent article in a Soviet journal stressed that the creation of a “peoples republic” in Ethiopia is necessary now to enhance the role of the WPE and ostensibly to give more Ethiopians a stake in the political system. In our opinion, this step is intended to provide the veneer of civilian rule and to establish an electoral process in Ethiopia, neither of which have occurred under military rule. []

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Ethiopian-Soviet Military and Economic Ties

Relations between Addis Ababa and Moscow have expanded dramatically since early 1977, when Mengistu Haile-Mariam became Chairman of the ruling military council. A prominent symbol of their relationship is the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that was signed in late 1978. [redacted]

The Soviet Union is deeply involved in supporting the Ethiopian military, especially Addis Ababa's efforts to suppress the longstanding insurgencies in Eritrea and Tigray Provinces. The two countries have signed over \$4 million in military aid agreements since 1976, of which approximately \$3.1 billion in arms have been delivered. There are an estimated 1,700 Soviet military advisers and technicians in Ethiopia.^a The Soviets are attached to all major military units and are involved in planning most military campaigns, especially in northern Ethiopia. Moscow's presence is complemented by another 3,000 Cuban and 200 East German advisers and 2,000 to 2,500 Cuban combat troops. [redacted]

Ethiopia is the largest recipient of Soviet economic aid to Sub-Saharan Africa. Moscow has disbursed approximately \$600 million out of \$1.3 billion in [redacted]

pledges, primarily in commodity credits and oil subsidies, according to our estimates. In addition, the Soviets are financing oil and gas exploration in the Ogaden Region and the construction of several small factories and agricultural facilities. There are approximately 1,700 Soviet economic advisers in Ethiopia. [redacted]

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The Soviet Union also has reaped political benefits in return for its aid to Ethiopia. The Mengistu regime is one of Moscow's most supportive Third World clients. Addis Ababa, for example, supports Moscow on Afghanistan in the United Nations and it was one of the few African states to participate in the 1984 Soviet-led Olympic boycott. Ethiopia also strongly backs SWAPO, the ANC, and other Soviet-supported liberation movements worldwide. [redacted]

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We believe Moscow is succeeding in its effort to have pro-Western officials within the government bureaucracy gradually replaced with Soviet-educated officials. For example, the regime appointed an ideologue critical of Western relief assistance as acting head of the government's famine relief operations after its former chief defected to the West. According to US Embassy reporting this transition has moved apace, especially in the foreign and economic ministries. As a result of this process, we believe there continues to be a steady erosion of Western viewpoints and influences within the government.

 [redacted]

[redacted] Based on US Embassy reporting, training of many enlisted men and junior officers is conducted in the Soviet Union and other Communist Bloc states. It can last several years and includes heavy doses of political indoctrination. [redacted] many

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trainees are alienated by their indoctrination and exposure to unpleasant experiences in the Soviet Union (such as racism and Soviet feelings of cultural superiority) the majority return home still relatively well disposed toward the Soviet model. Many of the personnel who are in these programs, according to the US Embassy, are ashamed at the backwardness of Ethiopia and are convinced—at least for the present—that Communism is the only system that can rapidly develop their country. []

Moscow and Ethiopia also maintain extensive political, military, and economic ties which we judge not only bolster Mengistu but enhance Soviet influence as well:

- Ethiopia is one of Moscow's largest Third World recipients of military aid, with over \$3 billion in deliveries since 1977.
- Addis Ababa has received approximately \$600 million in Soviet economic assistance, more than any other Sub-Saharan country.
- Various governmental and party delegations frequently travel between the two countries; Mengistu usually visits Moscow at least once a year; he went to the Soviet Union in November 1985 and met with General Secretary Gorbachev and other senior officials, and also attended the recent Soviet Party Congress.
- The Soviet Ambassador meets with Mengistu and other senior government officials frequently, according to the US Embassy.
- [] Soviet economists played an important role in developing Ethiopia's 10-year economic plan, and the Soviets are assisting in drafting the Ethiopian constitution and revising the country's legal system. []

Soviet Concerns

Despite the establishment of the WPE and several other trappings of a Communist state, we believe, based on US Embassy reporting and Soviet academic writings, that Moscow still harbors some reservations about Mengistu's policies. []

Impact of the South Yemeni Coup

At the outbreak of fighting in South Yemen between rival Marxist factions, Chairman Mengistu moved to provide political and military assistance to President Hasani, his longtime friend and ally. Moscow, however, eventually backed the rebels and applied heavy-handed pressure on the Ethiopians to end support to Hasani. The US Embassy reports that Mengistu not only resented the Soviet pressure but also may have concluded that Moscow was behind the coup from the start. In addition, the US Embassy reports that Mengistu probably questions the loyalty of civilian ideologues within his own government, some of whom questioned his aid to Hasani. []

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Despite the tensions that developed between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union, we agree with the US Embassy that there probably will be little significant impact on their relationship. Mengistu and other senior Ethiopian officials realize that only Moscow is willing to provide the large amounts of military assistance needed by Addis Ababa to defend against the insurgent threat in the northern provinces. In addition, Mengistu is deeply committed to the Marxist-Leninist system, in our opinion, and probably rejects any potential return to the West on political grounds. []

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We believe, however, that Mengistu probably will move to curtail the influence of civilian ideologues in Ethiopia, some of whom have enhanced their power over the past year. While he is unlikely to risk offending the Soviet Union (which reportedly has sponsored some of the individuals) by eliminating them, we believe Mengistu will tighten his security forces and move to ensure support from his military to preclude any threat to his position from the radicals. In addition, Mengistu probably will monitor or attempt to hinder the access of ideologues to the Soviets in an effort to prevent Moscow from cultivating a rival. []

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Soviet officials are not pleased with Mengistu's stacking of the WPE's leadership with his military cronies and other officers with questionable Marxist credentials. Soviet commentary in the years prior to the formation of the WPE called for a civilian party in Ethiopia and, according to the tenets of Leninism, the subordination of the military. Moscow is almost certainly aware of the large numbers of nonideologues on the party's Central Committee, and recent Soviet political commentary continues to point out the need to include more civilians in senior party positions and in the membership of the party in general. []

An authoritative Soviet journal recently castigated the Ethiopian leadership for its poor understanding and misapplication of Marxism-Leninism on such key issues as agriculture and the rights of ethnic minorities. In general terms, the article blamed "faulty assessments and hasty decisions" for the regime's inability to improve agricultural production in recent years. On the nationality question (clearly referring to the Eritrean conflict) the journal criticized the political and ideological immaturity of "certain" Ethiopian leaders and their poor understanding and incorrect application of Marxist-Leninist concepts to conditions in Ethiopia. The article further stated that Addis Ababa's ethnic problems were complicated by the delay in forming a vanguard party and the government's tendency to view ethnic problems from "non-class positions." []

The Soviet Union also appears to believe that the Ethiopians are trying to move too hastily in applying Marxist economic measures and in eliminating the private sector, given the underdeveloped state of its economy. [] Soviet economic advisers recently suggested price incentives for farmers, a reform of the tax laws, and the encouragement of private investment in small-scale industries. []

These issues, however, are basically minor irritants that Moscow may believe will eventually die away as Marxism becomes more entrenched in Ethiopia. In fact, a review of open source Soviet commentary indicates a general satisfaction with trends in Ethiopia despite occasional criticism. We doubt, especially in light of Moscow's predicament in South Yemen, that

the Soviets would encourage a move against Mengistu over these issues, and risk the outbreak of a violent struggle for power in Ethiopia. []

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Opposition to the Regime

Opposition to the regime's efforts to implant Marxism is found within civilian and military sectors, but it is disorganized and held in check by repression and skillful co-optation. An indication of the effectiveness of the regime's security is the lack of an anti-Marxist insurgency in Ethiopia of note, although the regime faces a challenge from two Marxist northern insurgent groups. []

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Civilian Disaffection

Opposition to the regime and its Marxist policies is evident in both urban and rural areas. In the cities, the US Embassy reports that the middle class and student population have long been alienated from the Mengistu government and most elements of the middle class detest the party, military rule, and the Soviet presence. The declining economy, nationalization of businesses, heavy taxes and special fees, the military draft, as well as a host of other government measures and restrictions also have demoralized and alienated them.³ Secondary and university students, according to US Embassy sources, are disenchanted with the lack of employment opportunities after graduation and with tight restrictions on access to advanced education overseas, and they hate the draft and resent the academic disruption caused by pressures to participate in various mass campaigns. The US Embassy reports that government efforts to win the people over through Marxist study clubs run by the WPE and other regime organs have had little success. []

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In the countryside, based on reporting from the US Embassy [] the peasants also display little enthusiasm for the regime's Marxist programs, and are especially unhappy with the collectivization, resettlement, and "villagization" schemes. Indeed, in many of the remote areas of Tigray, Gonder, and Welo Provinces—where conservatism is deeply rooted among the peasants—they continue to resist any government attempt to impose its writ or to introduce innovations that will disrupt their way of life, according to several academic studies. Addis Ababa generally has been careful in applying its programs in the north for these reasons, although we judge it has exploited the famine crises to force peasants into collective farms in resettlement areas.⁴

Despite the simmering unrest and scattered spontaneous protests, especially in the urban areas, we believe dissatisfied civilian factions are not likely to openly challenge the regime. The government has demonstrated a willingness and ability to suppress or intimidate most individuals and organizations capable of leading protest movements. In its early years, the military regime summarily eliminated civilian political parties or organizations and suppressed the labor unions, which played a key role in the 1974 revolution.

Moreover, many Ethiopians, especially in Addis Ababa, probably recall the bloodletting that marked the 1976-78 period, when military and civilian factions fought bitterly for control of the government. The US Embassy estimated at the time that thousands of supporters of both sides died nationwide, and we believe many people still fear that the military regime—now stronger and more firmly in control—would again react forcefully in the face of open defiance.

Ethiopian tradition also probably plays a role in limiting civilian opposition to Mengistu. According to an Embassy assessment, the majority of the Ethiopian people have historically accepted authoritarian rule, relying on a strong leader to protect the Christian

highlands from domination by their Islamic neighbors, which many Ethiopians probably still judge to be a far worse fate than anything imposed by Mengistu.

In addition, according to the US Embassy and several scholars, Ethiopians by nature tend to be reserved and suspicious of each other, with their society deeply divided by ethnic, class, regional, and religious prejudices. Thus, many observers believe Ethiopians may often condemn their government in discourse with trusted foreigners or publish anonymous leaflets, but they are unwilling to speak out critically, grumbling in private while publicly bending before the prevailing wind.

Military Opposition

According to US Embassy reporting [] opposition to Mengistu—while manageable—exists below the surface at almost all levels of the military, particularly among senior officers, and is driven by:

- A strong distaste for the degree of Soviet influence in Ethiopia and the large numbers of Soviet advisers attached to the military.
- The threat to military rule posed by the WPE and the growing influence of Marxist civilians within the government.
- Distrust of Mengistu's judgment in mounting successive large scale offensives in Eritrea and Tigray, which resulted in heavy military casualties and low morale.

[] military opposition, at least among the officer corps, stems from strong Ethiopian nationalism rather than ideological preference. To some extent, this may reflect the massive xenophobia found among many educated Ethiopians. Several Ethiopian officers now in high positions, for example, also were critical of the United States and its military and economic assistance programs prior to their termination in 1977, according to US Embassy [] reporting.

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We believe the Mengistu regime continues to rely on a mix of measures to help keep the opposition weak and off balance. In addition to a network of commissars—who carry out political indoctrination within the military and serve as his “eyes and ears”—Mengistu is guarded by a special Ethiopian unit commanded by a longtime political ally, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He also oversees an efficient security organization, the Ministry for Public and National Security, set up by the Soviets and East Germans and commanded by officials who owe their positions to him, according to the US Embassy. Finally, in our judgment, order is maintained by the knowledge that the regime will move quickly to restore control when necessary and not hesitate to execute troublemakers. [REDACTED]

Outlook and Implications for the United States

Appreciable levels of discontent will persist in Ethiopia, but, in our view, Mengistu's ruthlessness, traditional Ethiopian passivity, the fragmented nature of the opposition, continued (albeit grudging) support from the military, the gradual expansion of a new, party-oriented support base, and continued Soviet assistance will allow Mengistu to remain in power for the next few years. We believe Mengistu will be able to maintain his tight hold on power in the near term and continue his efforts to solidify his core of loyal supporters within the WPE and other nonmilitary groups to help institutionalize Marxism-Leninism. The planned promulgation of a constitution and the proclamation of a “people's democracy” later this year will provide, in our view, a further veneer of legitimacy to the Mengistu government and its political ideology. While we believe support for Marxism-Leninism will continue to grow at a gradual pace, primarily in the urban areas where the regime's grip is tightest, we also believe that the roots of the ideology will remain shallow over the near term. We believe most of society will continue to view Marxism-Leninism not only as a tool of Mengistu but also as an alien concept forced upon it by the Soviet Union. [REDACTED]

Mengistu's dogmatic approach to solving Ethiopia's economic and political problems is unlikely to change over the near term, although we believe tactical

adjustments will be made from time to time. We expect his programs will lead to increased economic hardship for most of the population, but Mengistu will continue to insulate the urban areas and the military from most of these problems. [REDACTED]

In our view, it is unlikely that the United States and other Western nations—despite their significant food aid donations—will be able to increase their influence in Ethiopia given Mengistu's deep distrust of the West, which is shared by several of his senior advisers. Based upon US Embassy reporting and Mengistu's actions to date, Addis Ababa will continue to turn a deaf ear to Western efforts to modify its Marxist policies and improve its poor human rights record, calculating that Western relief assistance will not be withdrawn. [REDACTED]

As Mengistu institutionalizes Communist ideology, he is also likely to continue his efforts to undermine US allies in the region such as Sudan and Somalia whom he considers either inherently hostile or as staging platforms for perceived US destabilization efforts. Over the near term, we believe Mengistu also will be tempted to play a more active role in regional and continental politics in an effort to bolster his image as an African spokesman, play on his role as leader of a new Marxist-Leninist state, and enhance his position with Moscow while attempting to frustrate US policy goals. According to US Embassy reporting, Mengistu in the past has encouraged several West African states, such as Liberia and Ghana, to move closer to the Soviet Bloc. [REDACTED]

Alternate Scenarios

Despite the efforts being made to institutionalize Marxism in Ethiopia, the concept so far has only fragile roots, with Mengistu and a relatively small clique of ideologues as its primary proponents. In the unlikely event that Mengistu were removed from office by a coup in the next year or two, we believe the influence of Marxist institutions would be substantially reduced or eliminated in many sectors despite the thousands of indoctrinated party cadres. [REDACTED]

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Assassination

Mengistu has made many enemies over the years and the threat of assassination is real. We believe such an event would usher in a period of instability in Ethiopia, perhaps resembling the turbulence of the early years of the Ethiopian revolution. No one individual around Mengistu, military or civilian, has the support or charisma that would allow him to assume leadership unchallenged. Coalitions probably would be formed to ensure continuity until a new strongman stepped forward in Addis Ababa. We believe it is unlikely that a leader fully capable of moving Ethiopia back toward the Western camp would emerge, because Marxists will probably participate in any coalition government. In addition, the Soviets could have a say in selecting Mengistu's successor, given their present level of influence and Ethiopia's continuing need for arms. []

gradually reinfiltrate the new regime with its supporters. We believe, however, that the intractable insurgencies eventually would undermine Ethiopian efforts to place too much distance between themselves and the Soviets. Addis Ababa probably would calculate that the West would not match the massive amounts of arms that Ethiopia currently receives from the USSR; in any event, it lacks the foreign currency to make any significant purchases. Because of these military realities, we believe Moscow would be guaranteed a high degree of political leverage with almost any new military regime, preventing a rupture in Ethiopian-Soviet relations. []

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A Successful Coup

Military disgruntlement over the never-ending wars in northern Ethiopia, the extent of Soviet influence in the military and government, and the expanding role of the WPE could embolden some factions in the military to attempt a coup. While it would be difficult to pull off a successful coup, given the tightly controlled and politicized nature of the military, it is conceivable that selected commanders of key units, operating secretly, could succeed. []

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Most of Mengistu's senior officers, who would be the most likely coup leaders, have little use for domestic Marxist programs or the new party. They probably would prefer to dismantle Marxist institutions such as the WPE and collective farms and formulate moderate domestic programs. Such programs might attract increased Western economic assistance, eliminate threats to their position, and rally domestic support. []

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In such an event, Moscow initially would probably not be able to prevent the dismantling of some Marxist institutions, at least in the short term. It would probably also wish to avoid a repetition of the South Yemeni affair, especially if Mengistu were assassinated in the coup, preferring to bide its time and

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