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53

Background Paper for Senior Department of Defense Officials

SUBJECT: Political-Military Situation, Somalia (U)

1. (U) PURPOSE: To provide Senior Department of Defense Officials with background information on Somalia.

2. (U) POINTS OF MAJOR INTEREST:

a. ~~(S/NF)~~ Political Situation. Somali President Siad Barre has ruled Somalia since a 1969 coup through a delicate coalition of rival clans. However, the outbreak of a northern insurgent offensive in late May and Siad's inability to control it have severely weakened his ruling coalition and sharply reduced central government authority. Siad retains the support of his fellow Marehan clansmen and family members, but risks overthrow as long as his policies keep the country divided and unstable. Recent moves to alter the Constitution to allow economic reform and greater attention to human rights may improve Siad's position, but, at present, his regime is struggling for survival.

b. ~~(S/NF)~~ Military Situation. The Somali military consists of a 40,000-man Army, a 2,000-man Navy, a 2,000-man Air Force, and a 3,500-man Air Defense Force. The character of the Army has changed, owing to the large losses it has sustained in fighting the Somali National Movement (SNM) insurgents. The expanded use of forced conscription to supply its manpower needs has filled the Army with very young, inexperienced personnel, while the use of Ogadeni clan members in key combat roles and the appointment of an Ogadeni as Minister of Defense has entrenched their position in the Army and has created a political problem for the President.

c. ~~(S/NF)~~ The Northern Situation. Since late May 1988, the Army has attempted to defeat the SNM insurgents. Although it has driven the rebels out of Burao and Hargeisa, key northern towns captured during the initial SNM offensive, neither town is yet secure from insurgent attacks. Moreover, Somali Army personnel and equipment losses have been extensive. Despite earlier fears, the SNM has not attacked Berbera, where the United States enjoys military access rights. Continued SNM guerrilla attacks on Army forces and supply convoys keep the Army off balance and increase pressure on President Siad, whom the SNM wishes to drive from office. Thus far, the Army has failed to achieve the military solution Siad strongly desires.

d. ~~(S)~~ Economic Situation. The economy has long suffered from periodic drought and centralized government control, but the war in the north, which has disrupted trade and caused high inflation, is a more serious threat to the country's economic health. Recent constitutional revisions, allowing for the dissolution of some industrial monopolies, may improve economic performance, but not in the near term.

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e. ~~(S/NF)~~ Foreign Policy. Foreign policy centers on regional issues and the need for foreign assistance. Although Somalia is pro-Western, it has tried to improve relations with the U.S.S.R. and Ethiopia. The April 1988 peace accord with Ethiopia addressed key problems, such as aid to each other's insurgents, prisoners of war, and the disputed border. The late May SNM offensive, which Somali officials privately believe was aided by Ethiopia, has soured relations, even though neither country has yet renounced the agreement. Relations with Djibouti and Kenya are cordial. Relations with Libya are on the upswing, as Somalia has requested and Libya has provided an undetermined, but limited, quantity of military equipment. To counter SNM propaganda, which Mogadishu regards as harmful to its interests, and to attempt to free foreign aid frozen by Siad's controversial handling of the war, the Somali Government recently launched a diplomatic offensive. Prime Minister Samantar's impending visit to the United States is a part of this activity.

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f. ~~(S/NF)~~ Relations with the United States.

g. ~~(S/NF)~~ Relations with the U.S.S.R. Although Somali-Soviet relations have recently improved, prospects for a major change in the relationship are slim, because Moscow is the main military supplier to Somalia's traditional rival, Ethiopia.

3. ~~(S/NF)~~ EXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS: Siad will remain vulnerable in the near term. Until recently, he has shown little interest in trying to achieve a political, rather than a military, solution to the war in the north. Changes in the Constitution which permit reforms may improve Siad's image, but opposition to these developments from hardliners in his inner circle will still complicate a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Key clans such as the Marehan and Ogadeni still favor a military solution.

COORDINATION: None.

PREPARED BY:

APPROVED BY:

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