

EPLF denies seeking aid from Arab regimes

From Mr Y.G. Meskal
Sir, Julian Ozanne maintains ("Embattled Horn of Africa is centre of fresh power struggle," April 3) that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) has "appealed to Arab governments for assistance" and claims that it has received shipments of arms from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Libya. These assertions are utterly unfounded.

To begin with, the EPLF does not have links of any kind with Saudi Arabia, prohibited as it is even to open an information office to cater for the sizeable number of Eritrean

exiles there. Libya was until recently one of the main military allies of Ethiopia, supplying it with substantial hardware, including Antonov transport aircraft during Ethiopia's large-scale offensive against the EPLF in its Red Star Campaign of 1982.

Ethiopia's relations with Iraq are cosy, eliciting Addis Ababa's public praise to Baghdad for its recent handling of the Kurdish problem.

Syria has never been prepared to risk the wrath of its Soviet ally by supporting the EPLF militarily when Moscow has been involved massively in

propping up the Mengistu regime.

While this is the reality of the situation, the Ethiopian Government has doggedly been sowing disinformation in its efforts to lure Israeli involvement to add fuel to a turbulent region.

It is unfortunate that Mr Ozanne has fallen prey to this trap to portray the 30-year-old war of self-determination in Eritrea as an extension of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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Mengistu under threat after rebuff by Soviets

Sydney Morning Herald 18 April 1990

ETHIOPIA

NAIROBI, Tuesday: The Ethiopian military Government, unable to dislodge rebel troops from a crucial Red Sea port and losing ground to another group of insurgents which has moved to within 160 kilometres of the country's capital, is now fighting for its life, Western diplomats in Addis Ababa said yesterday.

And while the rebels continue to pile up military and psychological victories, the Soviet Union, Ethiopia's traditional arms supplier, has refused to allow the Government of Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam to use Soviet aircraft still based at Addis Ababa airport.

The refusal has severely strained the transport of troops to Asmara, the besieged, Government-held northern city and staging point for efforts to retake the port of Massawa.

Unable to retake the port - four or five counter-attacks in the past several weeks are believed to have failed, with about 12,000 Ethiopian troops killed, wounded and captured - the Government is now bombing Massawa, the diplomats said.

The estimates on casualties in the Eritrean fighting came from the rebels, but diplomats in Addis Ababa say they are generally reliable.



Colonel Mengistu ... getting military aid from Israel.

The port, Ethiopia's main access to the sea and the major delivery point for acutely needed relief food for drought-stricken peasants, was bombed four or five times by the Ethiopian Air Force last week, officials in Washington said.

Tens of thousands of tonnes of foreign-donated food have been destroyed by bombing since mid-February.

The Government's position has continued to weaken since the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, which has been fighting for the secession of the northern province of Eritrea for nearly three decades, took Massawa in mid-February.

After that, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, which is fighting to overthrow the Mengistu Government, captured important towns in northern Shoa Province, which includes the capital.

At a Senate committee hearing in Washington two weeks ago, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Mr Herman Cohen, described the increasing civil conflict in Ethiopia as "possibly the largest in terms of combatants and the most destructive conflict in the world today".

As the Soviet role continues to decline - Soviet officials have told Western diplomats in Addis Ababa that the current military assistance program, which runs out at the end of this year, will not be renewed - Israel has stepped in. Western officials say Israel is helping Colonel Mengistu militarily, although not as much as the leader would like.

One of the effects of the Israeli involvement has been new military supplies to the Eritrean rebels from Arab countries, diplomats said.

So far, the severe famine that had been feared for northern Ethiopia has been averted, but aid officials say that to prevent large-scale starvation, much food still is needed.

The New York Times

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Superpowers join forces to break Ethiopia deadlock

By Richard Dowden
Africa Editor

THE ERITREAN rebel movement has given its guarded agreement to a joint American-Soviet plan to mount a relief operation for the besieged city of Asmara where hundreds of thousands of people are facing starvation.

The superpowers are now planning what will be their first joint relief operation — symbolising their newfound concern for people rather than strategic advantage in the region and using their combined political muscle to force the Ethiopian government and the rebel movement to put starving people before the war.

The joint US-Soviet statement said they were prepared "to work together and combine their assets ... to demonstrate our joint commitment to responding to this tragic humanitarian problem".

The plan announced by President Mikhail Gorbachev and President George Bush last weekend could bring American food in Soviet planes to Asmara and restart the peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean separatists. They founded last year, allowing the world's biggest war to resume with a vengeance.

In scenes reminiscent of the heaviest fighting of the Gulf War, a series of tank and artillery battles have been fought in northern Ethiopia, costing tens of thousands of lives. The Eritreans, who have been fighting for nearly 30 years for independence from Ethiopia, are close to taking Asmara, the provincial capital and last government garrison in Eritrea. In the town and the surrounding area still controlled by the government there are estimated to be half a million people. After a poor harvest last year and the war preventing normal trade, food is rapidly running out and the people are at risk of starvation.

As the rebels tighten their stranglehold on Asmara, the Americans and Soviets, working together, appear to have extracted two crucial concessions from the embattled President Mengistu Haile-Mariam. He has dropped his opposition to a relief route being opened through Massawa and relaxed his opposition to the presence of United Nations representatives at the peace talks.

The superpowers have also persuaded the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front to agree in principle to a food airlift to Asmara. The Front has been reluctant to allow

flights to Asmara because these can be used to resupply the garrison with weapons. The rebels also believe food can be brought more easily by road from Massawa; they are demanding guarantees that the planes, particularly Soviet aircraft, are not used for weapons supplies.

The two Presidents also offered to sponsor an international conference under UN supervision on the Horn of Africa and they held out the hope of getting the Ethiopian peace talks restarted. The talks, chaired by former President Jimmy Carter, stalled last year over the issue of a UN presence.

When they broke down, the Front, which had observed a *de facto* ceasefire for nine months, went on the offensive and in February took the port of Massawa, cutting off over 100,000 government troops in Asmara. Since then the Ethiopians have bombed the port and have tried to retake it in a series of land and air offensives which have cost several thousand lives.

Unless government forces can retake Massawa soon it is unlikely that the Asmara garrison can hold out. It is supplied only by air and the airport has been closed for days at a time by sporadic rebel

shelling. Meanwhile the Ethiopian airforce has bombed Massawa using cluster bombs and destroying tons of food stockpiled there.

The war for a separate Eritrea and the civil war between the government and the joint forces of the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front and the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement have put millions of lives at risk from starvation in northern Ethiopia.

It was estimated at the end of last year that, after a bad harvest, in October, more than four million people were at risk in Eritrea and Tigray. The main route planned to bring food into these areas was blocked when the rebels seized Massawa. Against all expectations, the government allowed a relief route to be opened along the road from Addis Ababa north towards Asmara; although the fighting has not stopped along that road, both sides have respected the agreement and food has been distributed.

Aid agencies working in co-operation with the relief arms of the rebel movements have mounted a cross-border operation from Sudan and these two routes and a extensive programme of purchasing excess grain locally have kept most people alive so far. It has also kept them in their homes. A good harvest from the short rains in March may enable most people to survive until the main harvest in October.



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The force was the 102nd army division. It will be recalled that the 102nd army division was defeated twice by the heroic EPRDF army at Kobo and Debre Tabor, and it has now been established for the third time with newly conscripted airborne soldiers, who have not completed their regular training.

(Voice of the Eth. People for Peace, Freedom and Democracy in Amharic 2 May 90)

Tigrayan rebels report government air raids
(SWB 17 May 90) The Dergue has repeatedly bombed the Kolesh and Ambat areas [both phonetic] of Merhabete province [northern Shewa], inflicting damage on people and property. In the prolonged attack, which the Dergue carried out from 5th to 9th May, 263 homes were destroyed.

(Voice of the Tigray Revolution in Tigrigna 15 May 90)

Government reports military successes in northern Shewa

(SWB 16 May 90) In a campaign carried out during the week against a Weyane [TPLF] infiltrating group residents of Gishe province in northern Shewa administrative area managed to annihilate them all by standing alongside the revolutionary and popular army in the area...

(Voice of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa in English 14 May 90)

Gondar front

EPRDF and Tigrayan rebel military claims
(SWB 20 Apr 90) On 29th Megabit [7th April] a 7,000-strong armed and unarmed [Government] force, press-ganged from Amba Giorgis in Gonder region with the false promise that those who did not have guns would be given them, and ordered to torture the people and destroy the Weyanes [TPLF], was sent to Debark [northern Gonder region], but it was dispersed by the EPRDF army and the inhabitants of the area.

(Voice of the Tigray Revolution in Amharic 18 Apr 90)

Ethiopian radio reports 70 rebels killed in northern Gonder

(SWB 10 May 90) Members of northern Gonder administrative area, fully supported by local people, have continued mopping-up operations against the anti-peace and anti-unity Weyane group [TPLF]. According to a report from the revolutionary campaign centre of the administrative area, given to the Ethiopian news agency, 70 bandits were destroyed in a campaign carried out by the people's militia of the Dim Dima area, in Setit Himora and Wegera provinces this week.

(Voice of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Amharic 8 May 90)

Fighting in Eritrea

EPLF appeal about bombing of Eritrea
(EPLF press release 9 Apr 90) The Ethiopian regime has unleashed a campaign of intensive aerial bombardment against EPLF controlled towns, and principally against the port of Massawa with the sole aim of destroying the port facilities, key commercial installations and civilian centres. In a wave of blanket bombings that started on April 3, Ethiopian MiG fighter planes have showered cluster, napalm and demolition bombs reducing several residential and commercial buildings in Massawa and Afabet to rubble. 64 civilians ... have been killed while 174 others were wounded in five rounds of bombings against Massawa on April 4, 6, and 7 respectively. 16 civilians were killed, 24 others wounded and 100 homes at the centre of town destroyed during an earlier bombing of Afabet on April 3.

EPLF claims defection of WPE secretary and pilots

(SWB 20 Apr 90) The pro-EPLF Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea said on 18th April that Muse Bekhit, a Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) secretary from Senhit (Keren) province (central Eritrea), had defected from the "Dergue government" while on a government visit to North Yemen. Another report in the same bulletin said that on the 17th a second Ethiopian pilot, flying a MiG-23, had defected to North Yemen. The pilot, Capt Esuyihun Ashine, "revealed that the aircraft which he was flying had carried cluster bombs supplied to Ethiopia by Israel. He added that he dropped the bombs in the Red Sea".

EPLF: 6,500 government troops killed in Ginda clash

(SWB 27 Apr 90) The pro-EPLF Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea said on 25th April that the EPLF had killed 6,500 government troops and wounded 9,000 in the latter's "third futile attempt" on the Ginda front. It added that this latest enemy attack had been launched on 19th April; the government forces' two previous attacks, made shortly after the EPLF's capture of Mitsiwa, had resulted in their losing a total of 18,500 troops, 7,000 of them killed. The station said in another report that EPLF forces had attacked government troops entrenched in Senafe (south of Asmera) and its environs on 24th April, putting them all out of action.

EPLF report attack launched on Asmera

(SWB 26 Apr 90) In a military action launched by the EPLF people's force inside Asmera town [capital of Eritrea] five members of the Ethiopian air force were killed and eight others were wounded. Our combatants launched this successful offensive against the Ethiopian air force detachment there. The attack was carried out in a place called (?Alfa Rome) in Asmera at 4:30 pm on 19th April.

(Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea in Tigrigna 24 Apr 90)

Government report of shelling of Asmera airport by EPLF

(SWB 21 May 90) Voice of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) cited the Ethiopian news agency on 19th May for a report that the EPLF had "made a futile attempt to shell Asmera airport from far away by infiltrating its agents during the week". According to the agency report, this was undertaken "with a view to disrupting the work... to deliver aid by land and air to drought-hit compatriots in autonomous Eritrea". No further details of the attack on the airport were given.

EPLF reports another air raid on Mitsiwa

(SWB 19 May 90) Enemy fighter planes yesterday morning raided the places known as Edaga and Girar in Mitsiwa [Massawa] port. The fighter planes, which arrived at 0700, dropped four napalm bombs. In this, the seventh air raid, there were no casualties, although there was limited damage to property.

On 5 June the BBC reported that the Ethiopian Government for the ninth time had bombed Massawa. No casualties were reported.

EPLF: over 1,000 government troops put out of action

(SWB 24 May 90) The pro-EPLF Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea said on 22nd May that the EPLF army had put more than 1,070 enemy troops out of action on the Segeneyti front (south-east of Asmera). It said 507 were killed, 565 wounded and six others captured. The same radio reported the next day that the government forces had used heavy weapons to shell the Segeneyti area and had destroyed two churches and a school in an air raid as well as burning many homes.

Fighting in northern Shewa, Segeneyti and Ginda fronts

(SWB 4 Jun 90) Voice of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) reported on 31st May that government forces had recaptured Kara Michik and Meranya (about 100 miles north north-east of Addis), after defeating TPLF forces which had infiltrated the northern Shewa border. Reporting on 2nd June, Voice of the Tigray Revolution said that the Fourth Battalion of the government's 124th Brigade was "completely in disarray" during an engagement on 31st May with Tigray rebels at Alem (in northern Shewa about 80 miles north of Addis Ababa).

The joint offensive launched by the TPLF and the EPLF on the Segeneyti front was being resisted by the army "with great martyrdom", Voice of Ethiopia said on 31st May, calling for the "unreserved support" of the entire Ethiopian population on this front. Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea reported on the 31st that in the Segeneyti offensive EPLF soldiers had put more than 12,000 government troops out of action, of whom 7,000 soldiers had been killed, 4,000 wounded and 1,100 captured.

Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea reported on 2nd June during an offensive launched on 31st May on the Adi Roso front, on the extreme south of the Ginda front

(i.e., north-east of Asmera, between Asmera and Mitsiwa), the EPLF had put more than 2,000 government troops out of action.

Operation by Afar Liberation Front

(SWB 31 May 90) The Afar Liberation Front has carried out a successful operation on the Aseb-Addis Ababa road. In the operation on 19th May, the combatants of the front burnt out three trucks...

(Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea in Tigrina 28 May 90)

Wollega and Ogaden

Oromo rebels report 22 government troops killed

(SWB 10 Apr 90) Asosa, Western Oromoland [Western Ethiopia]; The heroic Oromo Liberation Army [OLA]... is confining the enemy force to the towns by blocking all enemy attempts to move to the liberated countryside. Accordingly, the OLA stationed in Begi province punished and dispersed the Amhara government soldiers in fighting at Taladu Dhaga Boka, 10 km from Begi town in Begi province, Asosa administrative area, in western Oromia on 1st April 1990.

(Voice of Oromo Liberation in Oromifa 6 Apr 90)

Ogaden National Liberation Front

(ION 28 Apr 90) The Ogaden National Liberation Front has just reported that at the end of March it attacked government forces in the village of Biqrod between Dhagabur and Qabridaharre. This operation was to show support for the villagers who were resisting conscription. In retaliation, Addis Ababa troops apparently intimidated the people of the Dhagabur region.

Human developments

Ceasefire

Donors urge immediate ceasefire

(AED 7 May 90) Major aid donors have called for an immediate ceasefire in the civil war so that relief supplies can be channelled through neutral organisations.

Statement of principles for humanitarian relief efforts in Ethiopia

(New York, 24 Apr 90) We, the representatives of Canada, the European Community and its member states, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America, do hereby call upon all parties to the conflict to observe strictly the following principles to ensure speedy and effective humanitarian relief to the victims of drought and conflict in Ethiopia in order to prevent large-scale starvation.

We strongly urge all parties to the conflict