

other areas of the world. But the Soviet Union and Cuba intervened decisively; their support for the Ethiopian government prevented the country from disintegrating.

The conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia and the Eritrean problem were never mere border disputes. By virtue of its geographical position, Ethiopia controls access to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, a major oil-route from the Persian Gulf to Europe. Interest in events in the Horn of Africa has therefore grown beyond the regional level. Since the stakes are so high, the parties concerned – Ethiopia and Eritrea, at least – have found ready allies among the major or regional powers in support of their causes. The situation was different for Somalia. Since it was the aggressor, and especially since it represented a potential threat to borders established in colonial times, it did not receive any major direct assistance.

Never a colony

The Ethiopian Empire was one of the few African countries that had never been colonized. Under the leadership of its monarchs, however, it had gained territory from some of its neighbours that had experienced colonial status. For example, following the very brief invasion and occupation of the Empire by Mussolini's forces during the Second World War, Haile Selassie decided that his Empire should have an outlet to the sea. He therefore sought Eritrea – a colonial possession of the defeated Italians – from the Allies.

In spite of organized Eritrean opposition and a plea to the United Nations by provincial authorities for help in preparing for Eritrean independence, Addis Ababa decided to put an end to the situation by force. Accordingly, in 1952, with the support of the British and (even more important) of the Americans, to whom the Emperor had promised the base at Kagnaw (in the territory he was claiming), the Empire, under a federal arrangement, extended its boundaries to include Eritrea. At last Ethiopia possessed an outlet on the Red Sea.

Haile Selassie waited until all controversy over this *démarche* had died down and then, ten years after the formation of the federation, judging the time to be right, he simply annexed the province. Thus Eritrea became in 1962 the fourteenth province of the Ethiopian Empire.

This act of annexation was, however, to prove a source of endless conflict and created a real quagmire for the Ethiopian armed forces. Ethiopia had claimed a maritime province for itself in spite of strong Eritrean opposition but from the time of the annexation onward it had to fight to main-

tain the new territory. Despite 16 years of military occupation, mobilization of 40 per cent of the army and the expenditure of a great deal of money, successive Addis Ababa governments have not been able to impose any kind of military solution.

Eritrea, which was so persistent in its resistance to the imperial power, is fighting even more desperately against the revolutionary government and the Soviet and Cuban forces. Thus far the province seems to have been growing stronger, both in the field and in its alliances. Despite the numerical superiority of the Ethiopian forces, their new modern arms and the naval support they are receiving, they control only three major cities in the entire province – Asmara, the capital, and the ports of Massaua and Assab. Ninety-five per cent of the territory is in the hands of various liberation movements, which are now besieging Asmara and are in control of the outskirts of that city. The guerillas can move freely about the province, from the borders of the Sudan, their ally, to newly-independent Djibouti.

But will these advantages last much longer, when thousands of Cuban mercenaries are being transferred from the southern to the northern front in Eritrea? It is clear from their numbers, training and modern equipment – not to mention the support provided by Russian naval forces and planes flown by East European pilots – that Eritrea's chances of seceding have greatly diminished. However, the troops fighting for the Eritrean liberation fronts are far superior to those who fought in the Ogaden. They have more than 14 years' experience in guerilla warfare and in the tactics of attrition, and they know their territory perfectly. They have modern equipment and regular supplies and, above all, they have outside support. Conquering this province could, therefore, take longer and prove more costly than many people think.

Liberation movements

The liberation of Eritrean territory is mainly due to two large armed resistance movements – the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) – which have a combined strength of 40,000 men. Both movements have undeniable local support and possess an excellent knowledge of the territory.

The ELF consists mainly of Moslems. Its recruiting, internal and external support and orientation are Arab. In recent years, however, it has expanded to include Christians, Baalites and even Marxists, despite the fact that it claims to be conservative. Well-armed and mobile, the ELF units are active throughout Eritrea, and also in neigh-

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