

# Soviets lead assault on Eritrea

The MIG 23 fighter-bombers swept low, sowing death in the tired dusty column of Eritrean refugees. The Soviet pilots were doing their level best to end the long struggle of the Eritrean people for liberation from Ethiopian occupation.

Six months ago, the Eritrean liberation forces were on the verge of victory. After being colonized by Italy since the 1800's, then annexed

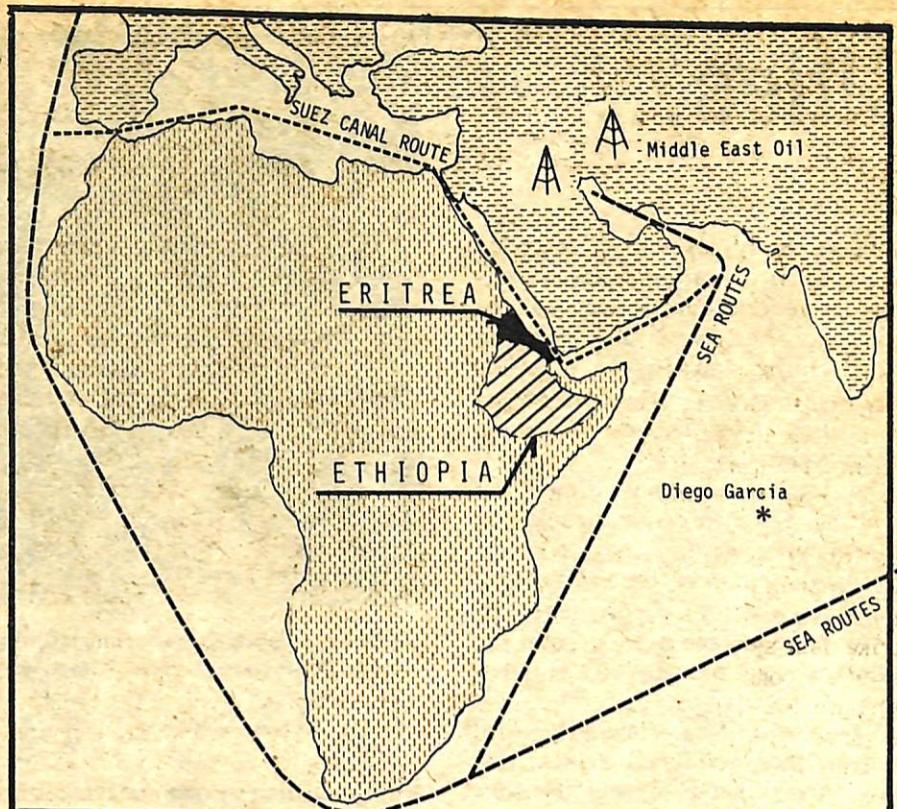
by Ethiopia after World War 2, independence was in sight. They controlled over 90% of their country and had a functioning government, agriculture, economy, and educational system going in the liberated zones.

The tide of battle was turned by massive Soviet intervention on behalf of the Derg, the fascist junta which runs Ethiopia. This time, the rulers of the USSR went all the way. On top of tons of supplies and thousands of Cuban army men, they sent Soviet troops into combat.

A statement by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front said, "It is no longer the Derg we are fighting, it is the Soviet Union. The MIGs are flown by their pilots, the heavy guns are manned and fired by Soviet troops. On each front, hundreds of Soviet experts are conducting the battles and shooting any Ethiopian soldier who attempts to retreat."

The final assault on Eritrea began as the head of the Derg, Colonel Mengistu, visited Moscow to sign a Soviet-Ethiopian "Friendship Treaty" on November 16. 120,000 Ethiopian soldiers took part in the assault, many of them fresh from the country's South, where thousands of Cuban troops took over military duties on the Somali border.

The Eritrean forces lacked the equipment - anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, motorized vehicles, etc. - they needed to take on the



Ethiopian-Soviet-Cuban offensive in positional warfare. Instead they withdrew fighting. The Derg's forces and foreign allies captured towns and villages, destroying everything except the port cities, which are Ethiopia's only outlet to the sea. The last city to fall was Keran, capital of the liberated zone, which had been freed only a year before.

The Eritrean withdrawal marks a

severe setback, but not defeat. An EPLF spokesman explains, "Our strategy is a retreat to the mountains where we will begin as we did three years ago."

For all the losses they have suffered the Eritreans have learned much about how to push their struggle forward to victory. The most important lesson is about the nature of the Soviet Union. From the time the Eritrean liberation struggle began in 1961, the USSR gave it verbal support and some aid.

But the Soviets were not interested in the justice of the Eritrean cause. They were looking for a way to extend their control over the whole area where Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia are located, the Horn of Africa. This strategic piece of real estate dominates the main sea route between Asia, especially the Persian Gulf nations with their oil fields, and Western Europe.

So when the rulers of the USSR got a chance to edge out their US rivals and become the main backers of the Derg, they jumped at it. Once they had a stake in Ethiopia, the largest and potentially most powerful country on the Horn, they dropped the Eritreans like a candy wrapper.

But until the recent offensive, the liberation forces in Eritrea saw this as a "mistake" the Soviets had made and would surely correct. Now there can be little doubt that the USSR is as deadly an imperialist master as the US was and must be fought and soundly defeated before the great goal of a free, independent Eritrea can be reached.



## Romanians nix Soviet arms push

The people of the small Eastern European nation of Rumania know how to deal with vampires. In the Middle Ages they put a stake through the heart of Count Dracula, who ruled the Rumanian province of Transylvania.

Today they are standing up to the modern day bloodsuckers who rule the Soviet Union. At a top level meeting of the Soviet-organized Warsaw Pact countries in mid-November, Rumanian President Ceausescu stirred up a crisis when he said no to Soviet demands that Warsaw Pact states:

(1) Increase their military spending by 3% annually;

(2) Allow the Soviets the right to assume command of Warsaw Pact armed forces in the event of a "crisis" situation and commit the other country's armed forces to battle.

On the first point Ceausescu said that Rumania's military spending is adequate for its self-defense, and that money was needed for domestic social spending and wage increases that had been promised.

Rumania is the poorest country of Eastern Europe and has serious economic problems, worsened by member-

ship in the Comecon (the Soviet-dominated economic "alliance" that drains valuable resources out of Eastern Europe). There is great pressure in Rumania to raise the standard of living of the workers. The most dramatic outburst demanding improvements was a 3-day strike by 3,500 miners last year.

On the second point - who will control the Rumanian armed forces - Ceausescu said:

"Our armed forces will never take orders from other than those from the party and the state. They will always obey the command of the Rumanian people alone."

Despite its membership in the Warsaw Pact, Rumania has always sought to maintain an independent foreign policy from Moscow's demands. Last August, despite strong Soviet objections, Rumania invited China's Hua Kuo Feng to the country for an official visit, strengthening ties between the two countries. Rumania vetoed a Soviet sponsored resolution denouncing China at the Warsaw Pact meeting.

Rumania also has good relations

with Yugoslavia, an Eastern European country which refused to bow to Soviet pressure and is not even in the Warsaw Pact.

As a roadblock to the war preparations of the Soviet Union and the United States, Rumania's Ceausescu recently proposed in an Independence Day speech a neutral buffer zone of nations between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, which would presumably include Rumania.

"It might be useful," he said, "to establish a zone between the two blocks where no arms would be located and no maneuvers take place."

An independent stand like Rumania's isn't too popular with the Soviets, who are bent on building a military machine to dislodge the United States as top imperialist dog in the world. Moscow wants Western Europe for its rich industrial facilities, and wants Eastern European countries to help pay the price of preparing and fighting a war. This would free up more Soviet divisions to move east against China.

War preparations aren't cheap. The Soviet Union has been steadily increasing its military budget, spending more than half of its overall budget on the military, which is a larger percentage than even the United States now spends. Moscow desperately hopes that other Warsaw Pact countries, which can ill afford increased military expenditures, will not in the future decide to lean towards Rumania's independent course.



Eritrean fighters have withdrawn to the mountainous North to continue their war.