

Intelligence Failures and Infiltration: The Case of the Ethiopian Army 1977-1991

Authors : Fantahun Ibrahim

Abstract : The Ethiopian army was one of the largest and most heavily armed ground forces in Africa between 1974 and 1991. It scored a decisive victory over Somalia's armed forces in March 1978. It, however, failed to withstand the combined onslaught of the northern insurgents from Tigray and Eritrea and finally collapsed in 1991. At the heart of the problem was the army's huge intelligence failure. The northern insurgents, on the other hand, had a cutting edge in intelligence gathering. Among other things they infiltrated the army high command and managed to get top secrets about the army. Commanders who had fallen into the hands of the insurgents in several battles were told to send letters to their colleagues in the command structure and persuade them to work secretly for the insurgents. Some commanders did work for the insurgents and played a great role in the undoing of military operations. Insurgent commanders were able to warn their fighters about air strikes before jet fighters took off from airfields in the northern theatre. It was not uncommon for leaders of insurgents to get the full details of military operations days before their implementation. Such intelligence failures led to major military disasters like the fall of Afabet (March, 1988), Enda Sellase (February, 1989), Massawa and Debre Tabor (February, 1990), Karra Mishig, Meragna and Alem Ketema (June, 1990). This paper, therefore, seeks to investigate the army's intelligence failures using untapped archival documents kept at the Ministry of National Defence in Addis Ababa and interviewing key former commanders of the army and ex-leaders of the insurgents.

Keywords : Ethiopian army, intelligence, infiltration, insurgents

Conference Title : ICMSI 2017 : International Conference on Military Science and Intelligence

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 19-20, 2017