

A Historical Investigation of Ethiopia's Claims over Djibouti

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Abstract: *Using the British Foreign Office archival documents that have never been used by researchers so far in relations to Ethiopia's claims over Djibouti, this study thoroughly examines the historical foundations of such claims. In addition to the classified diplomatic correspondence documents, attempts have been made to enrich the study with contemporary sources. According to the top-secret letter sent from the British Embassy in Addis Ababa to the Foreign Office in London in 1919, France had signed a secret agreement with Ethiopia pledging that it would hand over the former French Somaliland (now the Republic of Djibouti) to the Ethiopian government when requested by the latter. In violation of the agreement, the French government announced that the people of the territory would decide their future in a referendum in 1867. Soon afterwards, the Ethiopian government claimed that Djibouti was one of Ethiopia's lost provinces. To the delight of the French government, the people voted for continued association with France. Despite Ethiopia's historical rights, the new military government of Ethiopia officially declared in 1975 that it had no claims over Djibouti. In a second referendum held in 1977, the people of Djibouti voted for independence. This qualitative study*

thus analyzes Ethiopian's claims over Djibouti in historical perspective.

Keywords: *Djibouti, French Somalil, Franco-Ethiopian agreement, Afar, Issa*

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1. Introduction

The Republic of Djibouti, formerly known as French Somaliland, was acquired by France through a series of treaties and purchases signed with the Afar and Issa chiefs between 1862 and

1885.¹ However, some of the chiefs who put themselves under French protection had been paying tribute to the Ethiopian government.² That is clearly stated in Emperor Menilek's circular letter of 1891 which claimed: "... the line of frontier includes the Haberawal, the Gadabursi and the Esa Somalis and reaches Ambos. Leaving Ambos, the line includes Lake Assal, the province of our ancient vassal, Mohammed Anfari."³

Even the French themselves who occupied the territory acknowledged that most of the areas that became parts of French Somaliland had originally been under Ethiopian control. The port of Djibouti which became the capital of the colony in 1892 was, for instance, recognized by the French as Ethiopia's natural outlet. Tajura, the other port had also gained similar recognition. While writing about Tajura, a certain French writer confirmed that it was "formerly an Abyssinian port."⁴

The French also did not deny that Lake Assal, located in the heart of French Somaliland and known for its salt, was formerly an Ethiopian lake. With respect to the lake, one of the provisions of the 1897 Franco-Ethiopian boundary treaty underlines: "We have agreed that Lake Assal, being the property of the Ethiopian Government, they will not be stopped from taking the salts." Nevertheless, the Franco-Ethiopian treaty gave the French vast areas west of Assal as far as Lake Abbe.⁵ Strangely enough, the French authorities had already acknowledged that Lake Assal belonged to Ethiopia and that is clearly stated in the boundary treaty. And yet, they were allowed to include areas west of Lake Assal in their colony of French Somaliland.

One may, however, wonder as to why Emperor Menilek being aware of the fact that most of French Somaliland belonged to Ethiopia did legalize the French occupation through an official treaty signed on 20 March 1897. Here one may need to look into earlier political and economic developments. Although the boundary line between Ethiopia and French Somaliland was left undemarcated until 1897, the French had already acquired the colony before Menilek's coronation as emperor of Ethiopia in 1889.⁶ As king of Shewa (1865-1889), Menilek's main preoccupation was to build his economic and military power through territorial expansion so as to make himself the most powerful contender to the imperial throne. At that stage, he was determined to cultivate friendly relations with the Italians and the French that enabled him to independently import firearms.⁷

²K. Shehim, & L. Searing, "Djibouti and the Question of Afar Nationalism," *African Affairs*, 79(315), 1980, 211; S. P. Petrides, 'La Cote Francaise Des Somalis Dans Le Contexte Gio-Politique et HistoriqueEthiopien' (Addis Ababa, Memio. 1965), 18.

²V. Thompson, & R. Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa* (Los Angeles, 1968), 11; H. G. Marcus, H. G. *The Life and Times of Menilek II* (Oxford, 1975), 63.

³F.O. 1/32, Menilek to Heads of European States, 10 April 1891, 152-153.

⁴F.O. 371/3500, Campbell to Foreign Office, 3 July 1919, 82.

⁵F.O. 1/49, Franco-Ethiopian Treaty, 20 March 1897, 11.

⁶Marcus, 60-61.

⁷*Ibid.*, R. Darkwah, *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire* (London, Heinemann, 1975), 63-65.

Menilek's friendship with the Italians reached its climax in 1889 with the signing of the Wuchale Treaty. In an attempt to gain a protectorate right over Ethiopia, the Italians had inserted a treacherous provision - that is Article XVII. All Meniek's efforts in correcting Article XVII remained in vain. Finally, he declared a unilateral abrogation of the treaty in May 1893.⁸ Menilek then turned to the French for any possible help. After 1881, the French became the main supplier of arms to Ethiopia.⁹ In 1893, for instance, the Ethiopian government received 2,000 rifles from the French. More arms were consigned to Ethiopia in 1894. The flow of arms to Ethiopia continued to rise right up to the battle of Adwa in 1896. In addition, Menilek was allowed to mint coins and print postage stamps in France.¹⁰ For Menilek, the French had a special place in his heart. He could flex his military muscle with French arms while the battle of Adwa was approaching. It was also to the French that Menilek gave a railway concession in 1894 for the construction of a railway line from the port of Djibouti to the White Nile.¹¹ It seems, therefore, quite convincing that Menilek allowed the French to take control of French Somaliland in return for all kinds of assistance he received from them.

2. The Franco-Ethiopian Secret Agreement

Menilek had another fundamental reason for allowing the French to stay there. According to a confidential document found among British Foreign Office archives, the occupation of French Somaliland by the French was only temporary. It is stated in the same document that the French Government would return Djibouti to Ethiopia "when required." Part of the document reads:

... I have the honour to report the discovery amongst some old Abyssinian papers of an agreement, said to be duly and properly signed between the French ... and Emperor Menelik under which the former acknowledge that Jibuti belongs to Abyssinia and that France holds it provisionally, she undertakes to return it to Abyssinia when required. The discovery is known to very few and is being kept a profound secret. As far as I am aware none of my colleagues has heard of it except the Greek Consul General. ... The Abyssinians now in power, if they were ever cognizant there of, had forgotten its existence. In any case, its discovery has come as a pleasant surprise and they are wondering how they can use it to the best advantage.¹²

This report headed "Very Confidential" was sent to the British Foreign Office on 3 July 1919 by Gerald Campbell, a British resident in Addis Ababa. As can be understood from the report, Campbell had been informed about the discovery of the Franco-Ethiopian secret agreement by Mr. Madjjoannou, the Greek Consul General, who according to Campbell was the advisor of *Fitawrari* Habte Giorgis, the Ethiopian War Minister. This is explicitly stated in the same letter: "If the Minister of War shows the document to the Greek Consul General, I shall then learn the

⁸Marcus, 114, 145; Darkwah, 25-27; G. Berkeley, *The Campaign of Adwa and the Rise of Menilek* (New York: Negro University Press, 1902), 54.

⁹Berkeley, 112-113; A. B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* (Westport: Methuen & Company, 1901), 65, 427.

¹⁰Marcus, 148, 153, 158; Berkeley, 125.

¹¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974* (London, James Currey, 1991), 101.

¹²F.O. 371/3500, Campbell to Foreign Office, 3 July 1919, 82.

date on which the agreement was signed.”¹³ In his subsequent letter of 12 July 1919, Campbell reported that the secret agreement was signed in 1896.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that the secret agreement signed between Ethiopia and France had been forgotten and probably unknown to Ethiopian authorities until 1919. Perhaps, Emperor Menilek and *Ras* Mekonnen died without revealing the secret document to their successors.

2.1 Italy’s Request for the Cession of French Somaliland

It was Italy’s claim over French Somaliland after the end of World War I that made the Ethiopian authorities in power aware of the existence of such an agreement. By Article XIII of the 1915 Treaty of London, Italy had been promised to get “equitable territorial compensation” for joining the Allies during World War I. After the end of the war, the Italian government, among other demands, asked for the cession of French Somaliland by France to Italy.¹⁵ In the eyes of the Italians, “the acquisition of Djibouti was a goal of absolute necessity.”¹⁶

It was at this point (when the Italians pressed the French to cede Djibouti) that the French informed Ras Teferi Mekonnen about the existence of the secret agreement signed between his father, Ras Mekonnen (Menilek’s right-hand man and governor of Harar) and Leonce Lagarde, the governor of French Somaliland. It is apparent that the French might have revealed the secret document to Ras Teferi to count on Ethiopia’s support in the opposition against Italy’s claim over French Somaliland.¹⁷ In his letter of 12 July 1919, Campbell reported that the original version of the secret agreement was in the hands of Ras Teferi.¹⁸

The document was thus used as a weapon to repudiate Italy’s claim over French Somaliland. There is, however, no clue so far as to what happened to the document and in what ways the Ethiopian government used it. In his first letter, Campbell has in fact suggested that the Ethiopian government might possibly use the document to get French support for Ethiopia’s admission to the League of Nations.¹⁹ Given the sensitivity and validity of the Franco-Ethiopian secret agreement, the Ethiopian government wanted only a small favour from the French. As we shall see later, it was only in the 1960s that the imperial government of Ethiopia began to boldly declare that Djibouti was an integral part of Ethiopia.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵G. W. Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Harvard, 1967), 64; E. M. Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire Builder* (London, 1977), 7; C. S. Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925* (London, 1967), 434; H. G. Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I: The Formative Years 1896-1936* (Berkeley, 1987), 45.

¹⁶Thompson & Adloff, 13.

¹⁷A. Piccioli, *Gli Annali Dell Africa Italiana*. Anno 2, No. 1 (Roma, 1939), 25; Petrides, 27, 42.

¹⁸F.O 371/3500, Campbell to Foreign Office, 12 July 1919, 84.

¹⁹F.O 371/3500, Campbell to Foreign Office, 3 July 1919, 82.

France had, of course, backed Ethiopia when Britain and Italy strongly opposed Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations.²⁰ In those days, Ethiopia was strongly criticized for its failure to ban the slave trade and as a result European governments believed that it should not join the club of civilized nations. Contrary to the British and Italian positions, the French supported Ethiopia's admission presumably due to the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries.

Though grateful to the French, Ras Teferi wanted more than diplomatic support from them. According to a diplomatic source dated 1924, the Ethiopian government was asking for the acquisition of Djibouti. In his letter of 28 May 1924, the British ambassador to France reported to his government: "... Ras Taffari has definitely arranged to return to Paris after visits to England and Italy in connection with negotiations now in progress to secure the port of Jibuti for Abyssinia."²¹

Although the French believed that any idea of ceding Djibouti to Ethiopia would destroy French interests in that colony, they decided not to allow the Ethiopian authorities to "get the impression that [the] French Government was unwilling to enter into negotiations more especially at a time when other nations were showing signs of desire to obtain concessions from Abyssinia."²²

The noncommittal reply of the French policy with respect to Ethiopia's claim over Djibouti continued to be pursued right up to the 1930s until Italy renewed its demand for the cessation of French Somaliland. In an attempt to bring Italy into an anti-German camp, France decided to sacrifice a small territory from French Somaliland. According to a treaty signed between Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator and Pierre Laval, the then French Foreign Minister, on 7 January 1935, France ceded a strip of land (13.5 miles) to Italy along the Damera area, northern part of French Somaliland, to be added to the adjoining Italian colony of Eritrea. In addition, the Italian government was allowed to buy 2,500 shares (seven percent) from the Ethio-Djibouti railway company.²³ That was, however, a violation of the Franco-Ethiopian secret agreement of 1896. France had agreed not to transfer French Somaliland to any other power but Ethiopia.²⁴

2.2. The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia and the Occupation Period

Ten months after the Mussolini-Laval pact, Italy invaded Ethiopia. Mussolini seemed to have concluded that the French Premier would not oppose Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Laval, on his part, was not prepared to oppose Mussolini's move for he thought that the 1935 agreement bore some military advantages for France. He believed that the agreement would free France's

²⁰F.O. 371/11574, C. Bentinck to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 15 May 1924, 215.

²¹F.O. 371/9993, British Ambassador in Paris to Foreign Office, 28 May 1924, 149.

²²*Ibid.*, 168.

²³Baer, 74-75; G. Martelli, *Italy Against the World* (London, 1937), 58; Robertson, 114-116; F. D. Laurens, *France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936* (Paris, 1967), 20-21.

²⁴F.O 371/3500, Campbell to Foreign Office, 3 July 1919, 82.

southern flank from possible Italian attack and ensure French security in the Mediterranean region.²⁵

The French Premier could not, however, maintain his wait and see policy. Mussolini's aggression against Ethiopia posed a serious dilemma for Laval: would he keep up the Franco-Italian friendship by ignoring Ethiopia and the League of Nations or should he better throw away those military advantages for the sake of saving Ethiopia from Fascist onslaught by coming into terms with Great Britain which advocated sanctions to be imposed on the aggressor, Italy? Laval, of course, believed that British friendship should not be ruled out and deserved much more weight. At the same time, the Franco-Ethiopian agreement should not be abandoned altogether. As a contemporary French Chief-of-Staff put it: "For us, Italy is important, England is essential."²⁶

Laval then told Mussolini that France would not betray the League of Nations. Subsequently, Laval accepted the League's resolutions – economic and financial sanctions to be imposed on Italy. But, he asked the British to exclude military sanctions. Laval thought that for Mussolini economic sanctions would be tolerable whereas military sanctions would be tantamount to declaration of war on Italy.²⁷

Nevertheless, France's lenient policy towards Italy did not prevent Mussolini from reviving the old Italian claim over French Somaliland. By the end of 1938, the Italian government pressed the French to cede their colony to Italy. The Italians wanted to take control of French Somaliland either through negotiation or through armed struggle. They, therefore, began to fabricate unfounded allegations directed against the French. In this regard Bentinck reported: "The Italian press complains that French Somaliland has been a place of refuge for Ethiopians who have carried on anti-Italian activities."²⁸ The Italians also accused the French of declining to improve the service of the railway which was increasingly used by the Italians following their capture of Addis Ababa in May 1936. These allegations were, however, groundless. Ethiopians who took refuge in French Somaliland "have never been allowed to carry on active warfare against the Italians." Nor was the railway service neglected by the French. During the pre-war period, the average daily load of the railway was 60 tons. In December 1937, the carrying capacity of the railway grew to 700 tons per day. In 1939, that figure rose to 1,000 tons.²⁹

Using the pretexts discussed above, the Italians took two countermeasures. First, they developed the port of Assab during the occupation period and constructed the Assab-Addis Ababa road to curb Djibouti's dominant economic position.³⁰ Secondly, they stationed a large number of troops

²⁵Baer, 80-81.

²⁶G. W. Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia and the League of Nations* (Los Angeles, 1976), 62.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 62-63; Robertson, 166.

²⁸F.O. 371/23383, Bentinck to Foreign Office, 3 January 1939, 30, 78.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Thompson & Adloff, 12.

along the border with French Somaliland. In January 1939, for example, the Italians deployed 22 tanks and about 10,000-12,000 troops along the border between Ethiopian and French Somaliland.³¹ It is also reported that on one occasion, about two companies of Italian troops penetrated 40 kilometers deep into French Somaliland and withdrew after a few days.³² Moreover, Italian aircraft conducted reconnoitering flights over the neighbourhood of Djibouti.³³

All those provocative measures subsequently severed the Franco-Italian relations. In response to all those Italian activities, the French were forced to strengthen the colony's defences. Detachments of French troops were brought to the colony for reinforcement.³⁴ Such Franco-Italian hostility had been predicted in early 1936 by Janquieres, head of a study section in Djibouti. He prophetically alerted the French authorities through his confidential report which partly reads: "We may find ourselves at war with Italy and prevent Djibouti falling into Italian hands. ... We should lose no time in fanning the flame of revolt throughout the Italian East Africa. ... We should maintain the hostile attitude of Ethiopians towards the Italians [and] support insurrections by smuggling in money and arms to the [Ethiopian] leaders."³⁵

Though it was too late, the French, as advised by Janquieres, were finally forced to turn to Ethiopia. They established clandestine contacts with Ethiopian patriots. Yet, that was not always possible for the Italians had tightened their surveillance over the frontier. The French were, therefore, compelled to send a consignment of weapons into Ethiopia through the Sudan with the permission of the British authorities.³⁶

2.3. The Road to Djibouti's Independence and the Articulation of Ethiopia's Claim

After its liberation from the five year Italian occupation, Ethiopia resumed diplomatic relations with France which was also a victim of German occupation during World War II. In 1945, the two countries signed two separate agreements. One of the agreements restored Ethiopia's pre-war rights over the railway and the port of Djibouti. According to the second agreement, a joint commission was formed to study the boundary line between Ethiopia and French Somaliland. The commission finally revised the 1897 boundary treaty.³⁷

In 1954, Emperor Haile Selasse made an official visit to France. A year later, Petitbon, the governor of French Somaliland, visited Addis Ababa.³⁸ The subsequent visit of President Charles De Gaulle to Ethiopia in 1966 seems to be another endeavour to strengthen the existing

³¹F.O. 371/23383, "Italian Claims to French Somaliland," *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Feb, 1939, 66, 70.

³²F.O. 371/22034, Jakins, British Consul in Djibouti to Foreign Office, 2 February 1938 118.

³³F.O. 371/23383, Ellison, British Consul at Harar to Foreign Office, 26/27 January, 1939, 60.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵A. Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War 1935-1941* (Chicago, 1965), 244-245.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 245.

³⁷Thompson & Adloff, 106.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 106-107.

relationship between the two countries.³⁹ In his own work, *Memoirs of Hope*, De Gaulle wrote: “I had frequent discussions with Negus Haile Selassie. We had known each other for many years. ... We considered it desirable to support friendly, reasonable[and] time honored Ethiopia. We were to conclude far-reaching agreements with him.”⁴⁰

Some two months before De Gaulle’s official visit, the Ethiopian government had already revived its age-old claim over French Somaliland. On 8 June 1966, Ketema Yefru, the then Ethiopian Foreign Minister, told the United Nations Decolonisation Committee that French Somaliland was an integral part of Ethiopia.⁴¹ The Ethiopian government announced its historic right to regain French Somaliland at a time when the French were preparing the colony for a referendum. A fortnight after his return from Ethiopia, De Gualle announced that a referendum would be held in French Somaliland before 1 July 1967. Concerning the referendum, he made it clear that “if they wanted independence, they can have it but they must not expect any help from France. If ... they agree to keep their ties with France, we shall do our best to improve the living conditions of the Afar and Issa.”⁴²

The French president made that statement in violation of the old secret agreement signed between the two countries disregarding the strong statement of the Ethiopian government.

Following this announcement, the Ethiopian government reacted swiftly. In its editorial, the Ethiopian Herald, the country’s leading English newspaper referred to French Somaliland as “one of Ethiopia’s lost provinces.” The editorial further declares:

The frontiers of Ethiopia were stretched out to the sea before the European scramble for Africa began. ... [But] the colonialist masters reduced Ethiopia to an inland country. Ethiopia’s eastern frontiers along the Djibouti area was sliced off in the later half of the nineteenth century through a system of bribes later claimed as “purchases” of sovereignty from local chiefs. Ethiopia was unable to have her frontiers respected for colonialism was then in its heyday. Djibouti is one of Ethiopia’s lost provinces. ... There is no doubt that after decolonization and in accordance to the hopes and aspirations of the people of Djibouti, Ethiopia will regain her lost province.⁴³

Despite Ethiopia’s historical, economic and social ties with the territory and irrespective of earlier Franco-Ethiopian agreements, the French gave the people of the colony only two options in the 1967 referendum: continued association with France or independence.⁴⁴ The other option –

³⁹*The Ethiopian Herald*, 9 June 1966, 28 August 1966, 16 September 1966.

⁴⁰C. De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor* (New York, 1970), 264.

⁴¹*The Ethiopian Herald*, 9 June 1966, 1.

⁴²G. Lusignan, *French Speaking Africa since Independence* (Boston, 1969): 378.

⁴³*The Ethiopian Herald*, 9 June 1966, 28 August 1966, 16 September 1966.

⁴⁴Thompson & Adloff, 91.

union with Ethiopia- was deliberately left out by the French. The result of the referendum was a 60 percent vote for continued association with France.⁴⁵

On its part, the Somali government also claimed French Somaliland as an “integral part of Greater Somalia.” After 1967, the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity pressed France to grant independence to French Somaliland. France tried to justify its presence in the colony arguing that withdrawal would result in internal conflict (between the two main ethnic groups: the Afar and the Issa) and possibly a war between Ethiopia and Somalia. In justifying French presence in the colony, one French naval officer summed up: “Djibouti is as helpless as a goat that two lions are waiting to pounce. We guard the goat.”⁴⁶

On 17 January 1973, the French President Georges Pompidou came to Ethiopia for an official visit. In a press conference held in Addis Ababa, Pompidou had this to say: “France is determined to remain in Djibouti. In spite of the fact that we are sensitive to our friendship with Ethiopia, we shall not shirk our duty.”⁴⁷

A day after Pompidou’s departure, the Ethiopian government which had been referring to Djibouti as one of its lost provinces, put its policy in black and white: “The people of the territory ... alone can determine their future status. Ethiopia stands for the free self-determination of the people of the territory.”⁴⁸ Apparently, as a result of the high level discussion between the leaders of the two countries, the Ethiopian government might have softened its stand on the future status of French Somaliland. Ethiopia’s legitimate claim over French Somaliland gradually gave way to accepting the rights of the people of the territory for self-determination. The Ethiopian government could have tried to win over the people of the territory by showing that Djibouti could gain a lot from its union with Ethiopia. It was, however, the military government that toppled the last emperor in 1974, which put the last nail into the coffin of Ethiopia’s hope of regaining French Somaliland. At a summit of African Heads of State held in Kampala on 29 July 1975, Brigadier General Teferi Benti, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council declared: “...Whatever historical rights Ethiopia might have had in this area, she recognizes that these are overridden by the right of the people to independence. ... Ethiopia does not have any legal act ... on its books asserting any claim to the territory [French Somaliland].”⁴⁹

To officially declare that Ethiopia did not have any legal claim over the territory was to deny the existence of the Franco-Ethiopian secret agreement. But one may ask as to why the new military leaders rejected Ethiopia’s age-old claim over French Somaliland. Presumably, leaders of the military junta known as the Derg had already declared Socialism as the country’s ideology and

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶National Geographic Society. “Djibouti: Tiny Nation on Africa’s Horn,” *National Geography*, 154(4), 1978, 523.

⁴⁷*The Ethiopian Herald*, 19 January 1973, 3.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Djibouti: UN and OAU Decisions*. Addis Ababa, 1976, 3-4.

they claimed that they were revolutionaries respecting among other things the right of self-determination of those people living under the yoke of European colonialism. They condemned the old regime as reactionary and rejected its claim over French Somaliland. Finally, French Somaliland gained its independence in 1977 and it became the Republic of Djibouti.⁵⁰

3. Conclusion

Although a very sensitive and highly confidential agreement was signed between Ethiopia and France in 1896 Empress Zewditu and Ras Teferi seemed to have been unaware about the existence of such a vital document. It was only in 1919 when the Italians pressed the French to cede Djibouti that Ras Teferi was informed about the existence of the agreement. The agreement underlined that France would hand over Djibouti to Ethiopia upon the request of the latter when it decided to withdraw from the territory. Between 1919 and 1966, the Ethiopian government remained almost silent for the French authorities did not show any sign of departure. In 1966, however, the Ethiopian government swiftly reacted when the French president announced that a referendum would be held in Djibouti in 1967 to decide the fate of the people in the colony. The Ethiopian government boldly declared that Djibouti was an integral part of Ethiopia. Despite Ethiopia's strong claim, the people of Djibouti were asked to vote for either independence or continued association with France. The French government deliberately avoided the third option, i.e. union with Ethiopia. The result of the 1967 referendum was a 60 percent vote for continued association with France. The 1974 revolution brought the Derg to power. Although the new leaders were very much committed to maintaining the territorial integrity of Ethiopia, they seemed to be influenced by the Socialist principles of self-determination with regard to decolonization. As a result, the Derg officially renounced in 1975 Ethiopia's historic claims over Djibouti. Eventually, in the second referendum held in 1977, the people of Djibouti voted for independence.

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