

DECLASSIFIED
PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
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SOMALIA

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

July 2, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Marshall Wright *MW*

SUBJECT: Somali Seizure of the Midnight Sun: "Progress" Report

Thus far, this situation has neither deteriorated, nor improved.

On the good side:

-- There has been no publicity, either on our side or on that of the Somalis.

-- The Somali authorities have not yet officially charged the vessel even with navigational violations, much less with espionage.

-- The Somalis have, finally, approved access to the five detained Americans by one of our consular officers. He will be travelling from Mogadiscio to Chisimaio on July 4.

-- The atmosphere in Chisimaio is calm and friendly, with the Americans stationed there included in the official Independence Day celebrations on July 1.

-- General Siad's Independence Day message was totally bereft of any anti-American tone, which is notable in itself and may indicate that the Somalis are not contemplating making a big deal out of the Midnight Sun.

-- The five detained Americans are apparently being kept in a hotel and are being well treated.

On the bad side:

-- The Somalis have cancelled a visit to Chisimaio scheduled to begin on July 3 by a U. S. destroyer.

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-- It has now been a full week since the Midnight Sun was seized and we have not yet been able to come to grips with Somali authorities on what will be necessary to affect the release of the vessel and its detained crew.

-- We have good indications that the Somalis do not believe that the seismic research equipment aboard the Midnight Sun is truly seismic research equipment.

The most worrisome part of this matter is the way it must appear to a Somali, even a fair-minded one. From their point of view, this is what happened:

-- An unauthorized vessel penetrated their territorial waters.

-- It refused to respond to a query from a coastal observation post.

-- After a long chase it was overtaken by a Somali patrol boat.

-- It was flying no flag.

-- It refused the patrol boat's order to heave to until fired upon.

-- It then ran up an American flag and on investigation was found to be full of very sophisticated electronics equipment. Obviously, from the Somali point of view, the strong suspicion arises that they have intercepted an American "spyship".

In fact, the ship is clean as a hound's tooth. (I have had Peter Jessup check this out carefully.) We are playing it cool, lest excessive interest on our part serve to confirm Somali suspicions of U. S. Government involvement. State wanted to take the initiative in cancelling the naval visit but I dissuaded them from this for which they are now quite glad. We have afoot a scheme by which the owner of the vessel will bespeak the help of an international oceanographic research outfit in persuading the Somali authorities of the bona fides of the Midnight Sun. The worst part of the situation that has obtained for the last week, our inability to have access to the crew members, has now been removed. We are still getting full cooperation from the owner and the charterer. All things considered, I think we are on the best course in letting the Somalis take their time in establishing what is, in fact, the truth. It is, however, by no means clear yet that this approach will work -- and it is still a distinct possibility that we may get a "spyship" incident out of all this yet.