



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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December 18, 1974

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MEMORANDUM FOR LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRENT SCOWCROFT
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Issues Paper on Ethiopia

Attached is an issues paper on Ethiopia for the Secretary's briefing of the President.

George S. Springsteen
Executive Secretary

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Attachment:

As noted.

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ETHIOPIA

BACKGROUND

The military leadership of the Ethiopian revolution no longer enjoys the widespread support in Ethiopia which was formerly the case. By imposing a Provisional Military Government (PMG) on the country, the revolutionary leaders have antagonized the academic community and organized labor; by killing former Prime Minister General Aman and executing 59 hostages from the old regime they have raised the level of emotion between antagonistic classes and sharpened the divisions within the military establishment. While the revolution's reform objectives are still widely shared by most of the population, the manner in which they are being pursued is now subject to increasing criticism.

The 100 or so young officers and enlisted men who constitute the ruling Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), and who remain for the most part anonymous, still maintain a facade of unity, but there are reports of serious discontent. The PMAC's failure to consult with the Ethiopian military units outside of Addis Ababa is deeply resented. The United States has heard from some of the dissatisfied military that there is a reported plan of action afoot to discredit the new regime and eventually change or overthrow it.

The PMG is about to embark on a controversial program in the civil field and it appears to have military intentions in Eritrea; either of these moves could further exacerbate opposition and divisiveness. Sometime in December, 60,000 Ethiopian teachers and students are scheduled to go out to the countryside to advance literacy, explain the revolution to the rural population and participate in development projects. There seems to have been little effective planning or preparation for this campaign, and the disorganization which may ensue could seriously discredit the new government. Furthermore, the students and teachers in question are basically hostile to the PMG and could promote disapproval of the regime in the countryside.

The PMG is in the process of transferring additional forces to the province of Eritrea, where a separatist guerilla campaign has been underway since the early 1960's. General Aman's opposition to the dispatch of additional troops to the area, a step which the more militant elements in the PMAC

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had been demanding, may have contributed to his death. It is probable, but not yet certain, that these additional forces will be ordered to undertake military action against the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) insurgents even though the situation has been relatively quiet over the past few months. The reinforcements are not combat-trained or effective as a result of their many years of garrison service in the capital and if sent into combat could be badly defeated. The mere move north by these units will be considered provocative by the ELF.

Externally the PMG continues to be concerned, as were its predecessor governments, by the threat posed from neighboring Soviet-armed Somalia, which claims large parts of eastern Ethiopia populated by ethnic Somalis. This concern caused the governments of ex-Emperor Haile Selassie to request large supplies of modern US arms for defense against what the Ethiopians claimed to be an imminent Somali attack. This request was vigorously pursued by the PMG, which implied it would turn to the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China if the US was not responsive. The United States originally responded favorably to the Emperor's request, but the question of military deliveries is now under review in the light of the evolving political situation.

U.S. STRATEGY

The United States has had close relationships with Ethiopia and important interests there, including the Kagnev communications station established at Asmara since 1942, almost unlimited rights to the use of Ethiopia's airfields and ports, and for a considerable period the support and moderating influence of Ethiopia and its prestigious ruler in African and world councils.

More recently the strategic location of Ethiopia, close to the Middle East oil supplies and the Indian Ocean oil route and located on the Mediterranean to Indian Ocean sea passage, has provided added reason for our interest in a friendly Ethiopia and stability in the Horn of Africa. This increased strategic importance of Ethiopia has counterbalanced the recent phasing down of Kagnev Station. And although the deposition of Haile Selassie has diminished Ethiopian influence, developments unfavorable to the US or the West in this second most populous country in black Africa could still have adverse repercussions for us in East Africa and the nearby Arab nations.

Our perception of Ethiopia's strategic importance was a significant factor in our favorable response to the Ethiopian request for additional arms. While we disagreed with the Ethiopian estimate that a Somali attack was imminent we believed a substantial US response was needed to the Somali-Soviet build-up if only to bolster Ethiopia's confidence in its ability to defend itself and in the US as a reliable associate. As the decision to provide increased military supplies was made for strategic reasons, it was extended in spite of the revolution which began in February 1974, and maintained after the deposition of Haile Selassie.

THE SITUATION NOW

The unpopularity of the PMAC resulting from its latest actions has increased the chances of further violence in Ethiopia; the present leadership's intentions in the fields of rural education and the Eritrean insurgency contribute to making its continued tenure uncertain. While, in response to US and other international pressures, the PMG has given assurances of a fair trial for the 150 or more hostages it still holds and denied a report that it intended to execute Haile Selassie, it could resort again to acts of ruthlessness.

On November 27, the day it was reported that the PMAC was preparing to execute Haile Selassie, and four days after the execution of the ex-officials, the US announced that our program of military assistance to Ethiopia was being reviewed. All military shipments to Ethiopia are now subject to case by case approval before they can go forward. The Ethiopians have been informed that the program is under review but not that current shipments are in question.

The eventual US decision on the continuation of military assistance and the manner in which it is conveyed will be an important factor determining the type of relations we are to have with the PMG. The decision will also be a matter of great interest domestically as US public attention to Ethiopia was aroused by the executions of November 23 and the subsequent reported threat to Haile Selassie's life. Also of interest, at home and abroad, will be the timing of the arrival of an American Ambassador, our mission in Addis Ababa having been under a Charge' since February of this year.

ISSUES AND OPTIONS

The principal issue at this time is whether the United States should continue to provide military supplies to Ethiopia

on the scale projected by decisions made earlier this year. These supplies would be worth about \$75 million (in grants, credits, and cash sales) during FY 75 as against an average of \$10 million per year through FY 73 and \$22 million in FY 74. The willingness of the Ethiopians to pay cash for a large proportion of the equipment they have requested from us means that they can purchase similar items elsewhere if we refuse to provide them.

The impact of our decision will be more political than military. A cessation or reduction of military aid would be taken as a sign that the US does not support the present regime and may actively oppose it. This could drive the PMG to seek arms from Communist countries. While we do not believe that either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China is prepared to supply arms in the quantities the Ethiopians want, they may take the opportunity to supply at least token amounts. Such an inroad by either Communist power would improve its standing in Addis Ababa and in East Africa at our expense.

Our decision may also have important internal consequences. Full continuation of military deliveries, while showing the continued importance Ethiopia has in US eyes, could also be interpreted as unqualified backing of the present regime, regardless of its past or future behavior. This could seriously discourage the moderate elements now in opposition to the PMAC, bolster the PMAC's present vulnerable position, or associate us closely with a government which could soon be in serious trouble.

On the other hand cessation of deliveries, while indicating disapproval of the military regime, could be interpreted as a loss of US interest in Ethiopia. It could also be taken as a signal by the opposition and spur it into an attempt to modify or overthrow the present leadership of the PMAC. An unsuccessful coup attempt could lead to the decimation of the moderate opposition. Moreover, even in the absence of opposition activity, an abrupt cessation of deliveries could alarm the PMAC and cause it to take severe repressive action in order to ensure its hold on power.

Between the extremes of unqualified continuation of military assistance and abrupt cessation are two middle courses: qualified continuation, in effect putting the PMAC on its good behavior and maintaining the possibility of a future suspension; or selective temporary reduction of arms supplies pending a

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clearer understanding of the situation in Ethiopia and the intentions of its present rulers, particularly in regard to relations with the United States. Either of these courses contains the risk of antagonizing the PMAC; but both have the advantage of putting the burden of proof on the Ethiopian rulers with regard to their intentions and attitude toward the United States.

NEXT STEPS

While we would like to delay a decision on arms assistance to Ethiopia as long as possible, so that we can decide on the basis of a better understanding of the present situation and the best possible indications of future developments, we may not be able to put it off much longer.

The Ethiopian Ambassador requested clarification from us on December 16 concerning US policies on economic and military assistance and told us he intends to resume talks with the Pentagon about arms purchases on credit. We have told him that the United States wants to continue with the new and emerging regime in Ethiopia the close and mutually beneficial relations we have enjoyed with previous governments. At this point, however, we lack information as to the nature of the new regime and what sort of relationship it desires to have with the United States. Until we have a clearer picture, we must continue to review the situation carefully.

Any extended delay in proceeding with the sales desired by the Ethiopians would in effect represent a choice of the selective temporary reduction option cited above, particularly as they wish to use credits already proffered (prior to the November executions).

If it is decided to proceed with the arms sales, the Ethiopians could be put on notice that further military deliveries would continue to depend upon our perception of the present government's attitude and intentions in regard to relations with the United States. The timing of an Ambassador will also convey an important signal.