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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: July 8, 1969

SUBJECTS: US Military and Economic Assistance; Somalia; The Soviets; Ethiopian Security; Nigeria; Middle East

PARTICIPANTS:

Ethiopia: His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor
His Excellency Ato Ketema Yifru, Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Dr. Minassie Haile, Ambassador to the United States

U.S.: The President

Emil Mosbacher, Jr., Chief of Protocol

Joseph Palmer 2nd, Assistant Secretary of State

(Present from about 11:50 a.m.)

Dr. Henry Kissinger, NSC (departed about 11:50 a.m.)

Substitute for first paragraph
The Emperor opened the conversation by expressing his appreciation for past economic and military assistance. Continuing assistance, especially in the economic area, is required, however, if Ethiopia is to remain strong. The Emperor then enumerated briefly the threats to Ethiopia's integrity from surrounding countries.

The President emphasized his own abiding interest in Ethiopia which derived from his personal knowledge of the situation as the result of his two visits. He explained that the question of military assistance is a particularly sensitive one in the Congress at the present time. Congressional appropriations for military assistance are limited and Ethiopia is already receiving approximately 60 percent of the entire amount of funds available for Africa. Nevertheless, he wanted the Emperor to know that he recognized Ethiopia's problems, that we are conscious indeed of what Ethiopia has stood for and that we have a special interest in assisting it to continue to develop as a strong and independent nation. Economic assistance, while also difficult, may be somewhat more manageable and we will certainly do our best to continue to be of help. Emphasizing the importance we also attach to the Emperor's role as an African and world leader, the President stated that this is another basic reason for our special interest in his country, an interest which, he stressed, will be a continuing one in his administration.

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The President referred to his visit to Ethiopia two years ago, when the Emperor had told him that the major threat to his country came from Somalia. The President asked whether the Emperor now thought that a genuine and continuing detente was possible and, if not, whether the U.S. should change its policy towards Somalia.

The Emperor replied that he was very much aware of and sympathetic to the President's problem with the Congress. He remarked with a smile that he had read a great deal on this subject and had come here in full knowledge of these difficulties. However, Ethiopia also has its problems, and timely assistance now can avert much greater difficulties for the future. The Emperor suggested that perhaps these problems could be explained in camera to the Congress in ways that would result in a more sympathetic Congressional response. He had not come to request extensive military assistance, although there were certain requirements which he had in the counter-insurgency field in order to enable Ethiopia to offset superior weaponry which the ELF and the Somalis had in certain categories. He was well aware that Ethiopia's basic requirement was for economic and social development and, while the country must strengthen its defenses, it is even more important that it increase its rate of growth. In this field, Ethiopia looked to the U.S. for substantial assistance.

With respect to Somalia, the Emperor underlined his deep concern at the extent of Soviet military assistance. Somalia is a small nation of less than two million people and has no need for armed forces of the size and sophistication that Soviet assistance has made possible. Moreover, Soviet assistance has brought extensive influence in its wake. Ethiopia had been among the first to sponsor the independence of Somalia and had always extended a hand of friendship to it. He continued to hope that the detente could work out and he thought that Prime Minister Egal shared these views. He did not believe that Egal was under Soviet influence but he thought that there were dangers that other forces in Somalia which are under Soviet influence could nullify Egal's constructive influences in ways that would pose great dangers for Ethiopia. Ethiopia had to be prepared for such a contingency.

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The President asked what foreign influences the Emperor thought posed the greatest dangers to Ethiopia in the area, the Soviets, the Chinese or the Egyptians?

The Emperor responded without hesitation that he thought the Soviets posed the principal threat. Their influence is strong in both Somalia and the Sudan, as well as in important parts of the Arabian peninsular. Their vessels have penetrated the Red Sea. Working through the UAR as a client state, he feared that they wished to make that body of water a Soviet-Egyptian lake. The Emperor went on to say that when he had visited Moscow two years ago he had asked the Soviet leadership very bluntly why they were pouring arms into neighboring countries in ways that posed threats to Ethiopia's leadership. The Soviets had denied any unfriendly intentions and had told the Emperor that he had only to request Soviet military assistance in order to receive it. The Emperor continued by stressing his own awareness of the dangers of Ethiopia turning away from its traditional friends as a source of military assistance and of accepting such equipment from the Soviets. He continued to wish to avoid such a situation and, instead, to look to his traditional friends to be responsive to Ethiopia's needs. The same consideration was true with respect to economic assistance. The Soviets had made available to him a \$100 million line of credit several years ago, but Ethiopia had only drawn down a very small portion of this amount. As with military assistance, Ethiopia wishes to continue to rely on her tried and traditional friends. At the same time, the government is under tremendous pressures from the Ethiopian people who yearn for security and for a hastened pace of development. They will not be able to understand if the government is not able to show progress in both fields.

The President responded by saying that both Ethiopia and the United States have the same objective - a stable, secure and prosperous Ethiopia. He well understood the internal psychological problem posed for the Emperor and his government by the attitudes of the Ethiopian people. The Emperor could be confident that we would bear the same considerations in mind in addressing ourselves to the question of how we can most effectively cooperate with his country.

The President continued by emphasizing our concern over the Nigerian situation and asked whether the Emperor had any advice for us on this problem.

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The Emperor reviewed the history of the OAU and his own involvement in this problem, citing the various efforts which the Consultative Committee had made under his chairmanship to bring about peace. He had been most hopeful at the last meeting in Monrovia that the Committee would be able to get agreement on a formula which would provide an acceptable degree of autonomy for Biafra within the framework of a united Nigeria. Unfortunately this effort had not been successful.

The President asked where the blame lay for failure to reach agreement.

The Emperor replied by saying that if he had to reduce the question to a mathematical formulation he would say that about 80 percent of the fault lay with the Biafrans and about 20 percent with the FMG which had shown itself much more flexible, including willingness to approve measures that would protect the Ibo population. The Emperor went on to say that, although the tragic conflict in Nigeria was primarily a tribal problem, it had been vastly complicated by the activities of certain of the great powers. Making clear that he did not include the U.S. in this assessment, the Emperor expressed his understanding and appreciation of the American role in providing humanitarian assistance. The views of the U.S. in this matter coincided exactly with his own and he welcomed the move that the President had made in appointing Ambassador Ferguson as relief coordinator.

The Emperor continued by emphasizing the importance he attached to the U.S. bringing pressure to bear on both parties to the conflict to get them back to the negotiating table. The Consultative Committee had not given up on the problem and was ready to resume negotiations at any time. He felt sure that the U.S. could be helpful in bringing both parties together, perhaps in cooperation with other powers. The Emperor concluded by referring to his recent meeting with the Pope who had promised that if the Emperor could bring the two sides together again, he personally would be willing to attend the conference and use his influence on behalf of a peaceful settlement.

After thanking the Emperor the President asked for his views on the situation in the Middle East.

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The Emperor emphasized that he thought the present situation was fraught with danger. He feared that unless a settlement were soon achieved, the situation would polarize with the U.S. and the Soviets increasingly facing a confrontation in the area. The Emperor continued by referring to his recent visit to Cairo. At that time he had told President Nasser bluntly that the UAR is the key to the Arab position and that it must face reality. The reality, the Emperor said, is the existence of Israel which has been recognized by all the great powers, by much of the rest of the world and is a member of the UN. Under the circumstances, he had told Nasser, the Arabs were simply not facing up to facts in their refusal to recognize the existence of Israel.

The Emperor continued by saying that Ethiopia strongly supported the Security Council resolution of November 22, 1967 which it regarded as the charter for a viable peace in the Middle East. At the same time, Ethiopia could understand why the Arabs found difficulty in sitting down in direct negotiations with Israel while Israeli forces were in occupation of Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, and Syrian territory. He was also aware from his conversations with Nasser and with Eban of the suspicions which both sides had of the four power talks. Both sides are concerned that they do not know everything that is going on and fear that their respective vital interests may be prejudiced without their knowledge or consent. To help in this situation, the Emperor had proposed to Nasser (and subsequently to Eban) that a new body be set up comprising the four powers plus a number of small powers appointed equally by the Arab states and Israel. The role of the small powers would be to assure that the interest of both parties to the conflict were given full consideration. This new body, the Emperor suggested, could serve a mediating function in seeking a solution based on the November 22 resolution. The Emperor concluded by saying that both Nasser and Eban had asked whether, if such a body were set up, Ethiopia would be willing to serve on it, and the Emperor had replied affirmatively.

The President inquired whether the Emperor contemplated that the new peace machinery which he had proposed would function inside or outside the UN.

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The Emperor replied that he saw a fundamental difficulty here. The Security Council has responsibility for the problem within the UN. While it too is composed of the great powers and smaller powers, it obviously is not constituted along the lines of the Emperor's proposals and therefore could not effectively perform the functions which he had proposed. He therefore thought that any body along the lines of his proposals would have to function outside the UN framework although it would, of course, have the November 22 resolution as its charter.

In thanking the Emperor, the President said that he knew that he was due at a luncheon. He looked forward to seeing him at dinner this evening and at their second meeting tomorrow which would give opportunities for continuing these very helpful discussions. After emphasizing the importance which he and his administration place on the Emperor's views and advice, the President once again underlined the importance which he attached to Ethiopia both for its leadership in Africa and as a constructive force in the world.

The Emperor thanked the President most warmly, stressing his satisfaction with their conversation. He had come to the U.S., as always, in friendship and, as a friend, had spoken frankly about Ethiopian and other world problems. He particularly appreciated the President's generosity in the amount of time he had devoted to these discussions and the understanding which the President had shown. He too looked forward to the further conversations which he was sure would contribute greatly to a strengthening of the relationship between the two countries.

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