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File: Portuguese Guinea 1974
POL-3 Interactions
Organization
(Jan-June)



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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February 1, 1974

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To: The Secretary

From: AF - Donald B. Easum

The OAU and Guinea-Bissau

MICROFILMED
BY S/S-I

Setting

Rumors following the recent OAU Defense Commission meeting in Conakry suggest that the OAU might be planning a military operation against Portuguese Guinea. More likely, we believe, are a series of moves to strengthen the striking power of the PAIGC in an attempt to enable this group to complete the "liberation" of the territory.

Background

Recent messages from Embassies Addis Ababa and Conakry have flagged attention to these possibilities. Addis notes that it is in no position to judge the military feasibility of an OAU strike against the Portuguese in Portuguese Guinea, but points out that such military action would be of political value to the OAU in contributing to its cohesiveness and would crown Gowon's and Nigeria's ambitions to move into the forefront of African leadership. Embassy Conakry believes that OAU support for the military liberation of Guinea-Bissau is more likely to be in the form of military aid to the PAIGC, and increased OAU pressure on the Soviet Bloc and Western European countries to provide more and/or greater military assistance to the PAIGC. Several African leaders, including Tanzania's Nyerere, feel strongly that liberation

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PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
May 4, 2006

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of white-controlled territories should be carried out solely by the people of those areas.

Analysis

The chances that the OAU could put together enough military potential to move against Portuguese Guinea are slim, at least in the short-run. Any such attempt by the OAU Defense Commission would require a massive effort in transportation of troops and materiel. We have seen no sign that the OAU or its Defense Commission are capable of such a performance.

The terms of reference for the Commission include both the defense of African nations from aggression and the elimination of colonialism from the continent of Africa. Certainly these two goals would combine, in the view of the OAU, to provide a basis for combined African military action against the Portuguese anywhere in Africa. But there is a difference between political decisions and military capability. The problems involved in transporting military forces to Guinea would be staggering. The closest troops are in Nigeria. They and their supplies and armor would have to be brought overland or by sea--either route would be extremely difficult. The OAU could call for attack aircraft from Libya, but there would be serious problems involved in delivering them over such a distance.

Based on what we know of the OAU Defense Commission's recommendations, the Africans are more likely to try to "beef-up" the PAIGC forces (some 7,000 men) with items such as artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, trucks, a greater naval capacity, other logistic support, training and financial support. The addition of sophisticated weapons in quantity (such as ground-to-air missiles) and extensive training in their use would obviously make the Portuguese position much more difficult.

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Drafted: AF/S:WPO^{mm} Neill:AF/RA:JWW^{mm for jww}Walker:jk
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Concurrence: INR/RAA:Mr. Carson