

~~TOP SECRET (S)~~ (3)

SENIOR REVIEW GROUP MEETING

November 4, 1976

Time and Place: 4:35 p.m. - 5:28 p.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: NSSM 239 (Djibouti)

Participants:

Chairman: Brent Scowcroft

State: Charles Robinson
Talcott Seelye
Bruce Laingen

DOD: Eugene V. McAuliffe
Les Janka

JCS: Lt. Gen. William Y. Smith

CIA: George Bush
James Potts
William Christison

NSC: William G. Hyland
Amb. Robert Smith
Michael Hornblow

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Attached to DCI briefing, "Djibouti and the Horn of Africa," 4 Nov. 1976

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Decisions Taken at SRG Meeting

1. State should prepare a telegram instructing Embassy Paris to seek high level consultations with the French in which we would reaffirm our feeling that it is important and in our mutual interests for France to maintain a military presence in Djibouti. The U. S. for its part would offer to use its diplomatic channels with countries in the region to support the French. This telegram should be prepared promptly and sent to DOD and NSC for clearance.
2. A separate NSSM on Ethiopia should be prepared.
3. AID should include on a contingency basis funds for economic assistance to Djibouti in the budget.
4. The U.S. and French should consult within three weeks. After this consultation the SRG should reconvene to discuss possible next steps.

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The meeting convened by Mr. Hyland at 4:35 p.m.

Mr. Bush provided intelligence briefing. (attached)

Mr. Hyland: Lets turn to the Issues Paper. The IG did a fantastic job in coming up with two options, neither one of which State likes. In light of this briefing it seems to me that the first order of business for the U.S. is to approach the French about what their interests are. Giscard told the President that it would be "irresponsible" for the French to withdraw completely.

Gen. Smith: General Marie told General Brown much the same.

Mr. Hyland: Is it not a given fact that the local Djiboutis will ask the French to stay?

Mr. Robinson: We see our position in Ethiopia likely to be changing. Our inventories there are declining. It would be difficult for us to provide real assets and support to the French. We have no objection to consultations with the French, however. What should the scope of those consultations be? What signals would we be giving? We should avoid just talking about Djibouti and the FTAI but talk about the Horn and the strategic considerations of a continued military presence. It would be a real political problem for Giscard. We should be careful and cautious. We have real doubts about the French willingness to stay or the willingness of the FTAI to ask them to stay. The consultations should be at a high enough level to include French military as well as political considerations. In these consultations we should not volunteer or imply that we will provide the French with assistance.

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Mr. Hyland: What is the rationale behind such an approach?

Mr. Robinson: Because we don't know what our position in Ethiopia will be, we should not create the impression that we will provide support.

Mr. Hyland: According to the CIA briefing the Somalis might jump in and occupy a key Ethiopian outlet. You are saying that our approach to the French should be that we just don't know about this? What is wrong with saying to the French that they should retain their military presence and we in return would provide them with diplomatic and military support?

Mr. Robinson: It would be a mistake to go in with such a precise notion before the beginning of consultations.

Mr. Hyland: The French will be reading the consultations for signals, particularly if we start in the next sixty days. And if we start passively they may get the wrong signals.

Mr. Robinson: You are misconstruing our position. Our position is that we do have to consider our position in Ethiopia. The question is can we go in there and make commitments before we consider the other issues?

Mr. Hyland: Can't we give them support?

Mr. Robinson: We agree that the French presence is important. We are talking about consultations at a high level.

Mr. Hyland: We have a positive aim which is to influence the French decision.

Mr. Robinson: We have done that. But there are quid-pro-quo considerations. We are not prepared to say yet what they are. The French should raise the question.

Mr. Bush: Have we official knowledge of their position through diplomatic sources?

Amb. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Robinson: Yes.

Mr. McAuliffe: Does the French military share our view that the Somalis will move?

Mr. Bush: Yes, ~~_____~~

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Mr. Christison: ~~_____~~

Mr. Seelye: The French diplomatic people say the probability of a Somali military attack is slim. They believe there is a greater probability of subversion and guerrilla actions. Then through subversion they could dominate the region. The French are helping the Issas by creating a new coalition government which is more sympathetic to the Issas and thus are trying to make the new regime more acceptable to the Somalis.

Mr. Christison: If the Somalis start with subversion and appear to be taking over, then there is a high probability that Ethiopia will start war.

Mr. Seelye: They will try nevertheless.

Mr. Hyland: If we follow a timid course our influence will go down the tube. Is Ethiopia a waning asset just because they don't like us? Are we going to opt out? That is going bananas.

Mr. Robinson: We are not proposing that.

Mr. Hyland: Of the two proposals why isn't it in our interest to say to the French that it is important that you stay there with a significant military presence. If you do, we will provide you with all possible diplomatic support and approach the Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians.

Mr. McAuliffe: That makes sense.

Mr. Seelye: I see no problem with that but let me play devil's advocate for a moment. If we demonstrate too great an interest with the French in the consultation they will hand over a hot potato to us. We think that our interests in the Horn may be changing and are doing an in-house study about it. Our interests in Ethiopia used to be founded on the use of Kagnaw and airports etc. But these interests are no longer so valid.

Mr. Hyland: Why?

Mr. Seelye: We don't need Kagnaw Station any longer. Satellites are doing the job and we don't need access to ports on the Red Sea. The airfield there is no longer important. To think in terms of Ethiopia being a counterpoise to Somalia is not possible anymore. Our interests are changing. Our primary interest now is to stop the Soviets and maintain our credentials as a supportive friend of the states in the area.

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Gen. Scowcroft: (Who had joined the meeting a few minutes earlier)
That strikes me as a narrow and short term look at our interests. Our interests were never really just Kagnev.

Mr. Hyland: Here is a country - Ethiopia - with which we had friendly relations which at present has a strange regime but whose enemy is supported by Russia. And we are now embarked on a small program for Kenya. The logic is not to write off Ethiopia. We should go to work with the French and use our influence with Saudi Arabia to keep Djibouti out of Somali hands. Otherwise Somalia will jump and Ethiopia will conclude that the USSR will be the only country which counts and will go radically to the left.

Mr. Seelye: If the USSR feels that they have interests in Ethiopia, they will try to restrain Ethiopia and the Somalis.

Mr. Bush: According to our Ambassador in Mogadiscio, the Soviets don't have sufficient influence to restrain the Somalis.

Mr. Christison: The issue of Djibouti is so emotional with the Somalis that it is our judgement that the USSR would not be able to stop the Somalis.

Mr. Robinson: There are two basic issues. Question One is the likelihood of a Somali attack. The second question is what difference such an attack would mean in terms of U. S. interests.

Mr. Hyland: I can't respond to the question of Somali intentions. We have to assume that what the CIA says may happen. If it does not happen then a lot of problems will disappear. It is not too soon to approach the Quai at the Political Director level. I do not know what the Somalis may do but we have to find out from the French what their plans are regarding a future military presence and see what the U. S. can do to help. If the French say they plan to withdraw, then there is a real problem.

Mr. Robinson: We have no real difficulty with that approach.

Mr. Seelye: Yes, if they want us to assist we are prepared to take the matter up with Saudi Arabia to see if Saudi Arabia can accept a continued French presence, consider economic assistance and support the moderate forces. I don't think we should consult with the Soviets on this matter although consultations with other countries would be okay. There is not much else we can offer. We don't want to leave the impression that we want to ditch Ethiopia. Maybe in the final analysis we should keep our relations open. We don't have any judgements yet. Our in-house study gives us a chance to take a look at our relations with Ethiopia.

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Mr. Hyland: I would suspect that a Somali operation would scare the hell out of Kenya.

Mr. Robinson: Kenyatta is terribly concerned about Somalia and about Kenya's relations with Somalia. I think it is important that we say to the French that they should stay there. Do we volunteer our assistance at the talks or wait for them to tell us?

Amb. Smith: We could offer to consult diplomatically with friendly powers.

Mr. Seelye: I think we would want to wait and see what they (the French) have in mind. If the French say they will not have a continuing military presence, we could then go to the Saudis.

Mr. Hyland: The U. S. stands ready to offer diplomatic assistance. We ought to take another look at our assets in Ethiopia and see how best to change the situation. Since the Emperor's overthrow we have given the impression that Ethiopia is not all that important. I think we missed an opportunity a year and a half ago when they asked for military assistance.

Mr. Seelye: In connection with the Secretary's visit we advised them that we were prepared to continue our programs. We are providing them with \$150 million worth of weaponry. There is a MAP program.

Mr. Hyland: There is no grant aid.

Mr. McAuliffe: We are ending our MAP grant this year. It is the last MAP grant in Africa.

Mr. Hyland: What is the rationale?

Mr. McAuliffe: It is part of a general phaseout.

Mr. Robinson: Would there be any disagreement if we were to proceed promptly to seek high level consultation with the French in which we would reaffirm our feeling that it is important for France to maintain a military presence and that this would be in our mutual interest. We would offer to use our diplomatic channels with neighboring countries.

Mr. Hyland: I have no disagreement with that. A telegram of instruction should be prepared in the next week and should be sent to Defense and the NSC for clearance.

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Mr. Robinson: What about Ethiopia. Should there be a separate NSSM on it?

Mr. Seelye: Yes, there could be a separate NSSM.

Gen. Scowcroft: Let's draft a NSSM.

Mr. Seelye: They are delaying on giving agrément for Godley. They are backing off on it because they feel he is a controversial figure with Congress. They are a wild group of characters. They are difficult to deal with. We have had nothing but problems with them.

Amb. Smith: Is there a possibility of economic aid to Djibouti?

Mr. Seelye: Yes.

Mr. McAuliffe: How long would the French stay?

Mr. Hyland: Probably for a transitory period but we could at least buy some time.

Mr. Robinson: The aid could be used to influence them to accept a continued French presence.

Mr. Hyland: What does AID propose to do? They should put some contingency money in their new budget. The sooner we know what we can provide the better off we are with the French.

Amb. Smith: What about the question of contingency papers which Defense raised?

Mr. Hyland: We should look at the contingency in case Somalia strikes hard.

Mr. Christison: Our feeling is that there is no way to keep the French there for a long period of time and once the French leave the odds are that war would break out.

Mr. Hyland: It should be high on the list of potential trouble spots.

Gen. Scowcroft: We should wait to see what the French plan is. Is there any possibility of an attack if the French stay?

Mr. Christison: No.

Mr. Hyland: We should talk to the French within three weeks and then reconvene this group to see what we should do.

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Mr. Robinson: Okay, and in the meantime the Ethiopia study should go on.

The meeting adjourned at 5:28 p. m.

Attachment

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