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(Drafting Office and Officer)

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Clearance:AF -
Mr. Newsom
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: April 4, 1973

SUBJECT: Situation in the Horn; HIM's Visit

PARTICIPANTS: Kifle Wodajo, Ambassador of Ethiopia
David D. Newsom, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs
Harry R. Melone, Acting Director, AF/E

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COPIES TO: See attached page 6.

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Ambassador Kifle said he had asked to see Mr. Newsom prior to his departure for consultation in Addis Ababa in order to have the latest American views on the situation in the Horn to communicate to his government and to inquire about the status of the Emperor's request for a visit.

Assistant Secretary Newsom indicated that His Majesty's interest in coming to the U.S. had been made known to the White House. As the Ambassador knew, this was a difficult problem because of the many pressures on the President's time and the uncertainties of his schedule, including the President's own travel plans. The White House had not yet given an indication whether a visit this year might be possible.

The Ambassador said that an attempt to isolate Ethiopia was being orchestrated by Somalia. The recent conference of Foreign Ministers of Islamic countries at Benghazi had pledged support to the ELF and castigated Ethiopia for allegedly giving facilities to Israel, a new and dangerous development in Arab-Ethiopian relations. Ethiopia had offered to show the Arabs the untruth of the charges and, in fact, the Arabs know full well that their allegations are not true. It was Somalia, not the ELF insurgents, that was behind this anti-Ethiopian tack.

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Mr. Newsom questioned whether Libya might not be the instigator rather than Somalia. Kifle replied that there had been a change in the power balance in that part of the world. Libya was unhappy that Sudan was turning more to Africa and away from the Arab world. Mr. Newsom said our impression was that the radical Arabs, rather than the Somalis, were the primary backers of the ELF. Kifle agreed that financially this might be so, but said that the orchestration against Ethiopia was Somali. He wanted us to know of the growing concern about these developments in Ethiopia and of the Ethiopian feeling that this concern is not well understood by the U.S. Government. There is no question that there are overt moves to isolate Ethiopia from the rest of Africa. An Imperial Visit would reassure Ethiopians about continuing American interest and indicate to the Arabs that Ethiopia does have friends.

Mr. Newsom stated that he already had said all he could about HIM's interest in a visit. He would like to put this question aside and to speak frankly, as someone who had been involved in the situation for many years, about the question of American "understanding" of the problem. The U.S. attaches great importance to its relations with Ethiopia. We are very mindful of the facilities and support the Emperor has given us both within the empire and on the international scene, as in Korea and the Congo.

But we are having serious problems with many of our friends, continued Mr. Newsom. They are saying that the U.S. does not understand the seriousness of their situation. Perhaps this reaction is due to declining U.S. resources to assist other countries. We are having great problems finding resources to meet our friends' needs, but the fact we do not have resources to respond to such needs does not mean that we are insensitive to them. It is unlikely that a foreign assistance bill will even be approved this fiscal year and we will continue to operate under the limitations of continuing resolution authority. As the Ambassador is aware, there are a great number of questions in Congress and among the public over what form our military assistance should take.

If a problem exists, Mr. Newsom suggested, it is perhaps in defining the problem and what we might do about it. The IEG has talked much to us about the Somali threat. We know about Soviet arms shipments and about Somali irredentism but, very frankly, we do not think that Soviet shipments have substantially increased the Somali capacity to threaten Ethiopia. Given our limited resources, unless there is a

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thoroughly creditable expression of the problem, we cannot respond as the IEG would like to have us.

Mr. Newsom said that similarly different assessments existed with respect to Eritrea where the U.S. has an important stake. We have the impression that the 2nd Division has the situation well in hand and that the ELF is highly factionalized. Perhaps the Benghazi meeting might change that. The U.S. simply does not have the resources to respond as its friends would like. It is not that we do not understand their situation, Newsom emphasized, but that we have to look very closely at how we use our limited resources. Our understanding of Ethiopia's problem should be evident from the fact that Ethiopia receives almost 80% of U.S. military assistance grants to Africa and has one of the largest AID programs in Africa, our economic assistance efforts being limited basically by Ethiopia's capacity to use funds on an economic basis.

Mr. Newsom said he could make no predictions about the President's schedule. But he hoped Kifle would convey to his government the importance we attach to our bi-lateral relations. The IEG should be assured that our ability to respond was limited by resources and definitions of problems more than by any lack of understanding.

Kifle expressed appreciation for Mr. Newsom's frankness and said he would communicate his message to his government. He remarked that it was difficult for him to explain to the IEG the U.S. Administration's internal problems, of which there was, regrettably, too little appreciation. He wanted to emphasize, however, Ethiopia's feeling of increasing isolation and loss of influence within the OAU. The IEG would be grateful for any help it might receive. In its planning, the IEG had not discounted the use of Libyan, Iraqi or other Arab "volunteers" in any eventual border clashes with Somalia.

It did not know how other countries would respond. The present attempt to orchestrate with Arab help the isolation of Ethiopia is all part of a Somali plan to attack.

While not wishing to take issue with the Ambassador, Mr. Newsom said one could look at the situation differently. The reorientation of the largest Arab country, Sudan, toward Black Africa had a decidedly positive effect for Ethiopia. Ethiopia's relations with North Yemen had become friendly,

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and those with Kenya, continued to be excellent. Mr. Newsom thought the Arab thrust into Africa had severe limitations. Their efforts had failed in the early 1960's and they have a tendency not to follow through, as exemplified by unfulfilled Libyan promises of assistance to countries such as Uganda. In the hard assessment we make, we have to put all this in perspective. We judge, for instance, that Zaire and Nigeria will probably not break relations with Israel. While the Middle East will be an important problem in the OAU and Egypt will remain popular as long as Sinai is occupied, we do not envisage Arab domination of the OAU.

Acknowledging that the two countries could not have the same assessments, Kifle said he wanted to emphasize the realities of the crisis of confidence that exists in Ethiopia. Somalia was not alone, but in any dispute with Ethiopia, would be bolstered by Arab forces. The Libyan air force might be available, for example. Ethiopia needed symbolic support and it was this message that the Ambassador had been instructed to deliver. Kifle promised to come back with impressions of the OAU meetings which he would be attending.

Mr. Newsom mentioned our eagerness to maintain a dialogue and exchange assessments with the Ethiopians. We would be very interested in Kifle's impressions of the OAU meeting. As one with considerable experience in the Arab world, Mr. Newsom had little confidence in the staying power of the Arab states. The Libyans have quantities of equipment but few pilots to man their planes. Similar conditions exist elsewhere. It would be difficult to find an Arab military establishment, except the Egyptian, as well trained and armed as Ethiopia's.

Kifle indicated Ethiopia was thinking of introducing the subject of Arab support for the ELF into OAU and UN meetings. The IEG might send special missions to Islamic countries.

Thanking Mr. Newsom for his time and comments, Kifle said he hoped that in our thinking we would not discount the possibility of the involvement of Arab forces in any confrontation between Ethiopia and Somalia. Ethiopia is convinced that the Somalis have changed their time schedule. Until a year ago, they seemed to be waiting for the Emperor's death but now, the oil finds in the Ogaden had stepped up the timetable.

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In closing, Mr. Newsom said that on the other hand, we had received reports from the Somalis of the build-up of Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden and of alleged Ethiopian incursions into Somalia. We hope, therefore, that recent contacts between the two countries will continue and contribute to calming the state of alarm we detect on both sides.

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