WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

February 27, 1975

Time and Place: 11:55 a.m. - 12:28 p.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: Ethiopia

Participants:

Chairman: Henry A. Kissinger

State: Robert Ingersoll
       Amb. Arthur Hummel
       Carlyle Maw

CIA: William Colby
     James Potts

NSC: Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft
     Col. Clinton Granger
     Harold Horan
     James Barnum

DOD: William Clements
     Robert Ellsworth
     James P. Noyes

JCS: Lt. Gen. John W. Pauly

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Secretary Kissinger: Bill, do you have a briefing?

Mr. Colby: [Began to brief from the attached.]

Secretary Kissinger: The President asked me this morning what Eritrea is. I said that from what I knew it was mostly a phenomenon of history. Italy grabbed it during the war and ....

Mr. Colby: It is also an ethnic creation. It has its roots in tribal organizations. (Continued to brief.)

Secretary Kissinger: Who is worried about the ruthlessness of the Ethiopians?

Mr. Colby: Some of the Ethiopian merchants and townspeople. The average Ethiopian is quite upset about the ruthlessness of the army. (Continued to brief.)

Mr. Clements: Libya favors a negotiated settlement?

Mr. Colby: Yes, but in the context of a solution that would eventually lead to the independence of Eritrea.

Secretary Kissinger: The trouble is Saudi Arabia thinks the Eritreans are a bunch of radicals.

Mr. Colby: [Continued to brief.]

Secretary Kissinger: What do the Black African states think of the situation? What are they doing?

Mr. Colby: They have taken no particular position.

Mr. Ellsworth: Well, Kenyatta has urged help for Addis. All the Black Africans are concerned about the situation. They fear that this will encourage every little tribe in their country to break off and start a rebellion.

Mr. Colby: [Finished his briefing.]

Secretary Kissinger: Bill, (Mr. Clements) what are your views.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE (XGDS)
Mr. Clements: Well, Henry, I go along with Bill (Mr. Colby). But, I'm just not sure that those people in the government (the army) know what they are doing and really wonder if they are capable of maintaining stability.

Secretary Kissinger: Probably not, but is that the issue?

Mr. Clements: Well, we get these noises -- just like Bill (Mr. Colby) does -- that there could be another coup. The situation around our installations is getting more serious each day. It is a different thing -- it's gone. But, that situation around Kagnew is very serious.

Mr. Colby: We could get a situation whereby U.S. refusal to supply arms could lead to a coup and replacement by people even more inimical to our interests than the present bunch.

General Scowcroft: Like who?

Mr. Colby: There are a couple of possibilities.

Secretary Kissinger: The only way you could trigger a coup would be to tell the new fellow what he would get (arms) and not tell the others (the present government). That would be risky. They can't keep a secret any better than we can. I don't believe the Saudi Arabians and the Egyptians have a clear idea of what's going on either.

Mr. Clements: Henry, are you saying that you have the idea that the Saudis and the Egyptians support the present regime?

Secretary Kissinger: No, I think they have the same dilemma as we do. I think they would support a regime that still is the old regime. They, too, are worried about radicals. We have the problem of kinship with the military regime. I mean, we've been operating in Ethiopia since 1953, and if we cut off military aid now, we could be in for one hell of a time.

Amb. Hummel: Another issue is to what degree we want to link the arms request and negotiations. We could use the arms to exhort them to enter into negotiations.

Secretary Kissinger: Yeah, we're great at exhortations!
Amb. Hummel: I don't want to get into a great debate on the problem of linkage. But, the arms supply thing will probably come up on the Hill next week. If we know that we are going to link the arms request with negotiations, it might help us on the Hill.

Mr. Maw: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is concerned about Ethiopia and wants to discuss it with us.

Secretary Kissinger: What are they concerned about?

Mr. Maw: All these stories of atrocities -- like the story about the 600 prisoners. Were they all slaughtered, by the way?

Mr. Potts: No, they got away.

Amb. Hummel: There's a lot of shouting going on about the situation in Asmara. The atmosphere is really bad.

Secretary Kissinger: It has all the characteristics of a civil war.

Mr. Colby: Could lead to the partitioning of Ethiopia.

Amb. Hummel: There could be a Congressional prohibition of arms sales to Ethiopia.

Secretary Kissinger: Yeah, why not. Spread it out a little.

Mr. Colby: Turkey, Cambodia, why not Ethiopia?

Mr. Clements: We'd be inclined to favor a small delivery, on a cash basis.

Secretary Kissinger: We've got two problems here. One is, should we give the aid? We could refuse on the grounds that it is a civil war. But then, whoever wins out would become more independent of us. If we refuse to give them arms it means we don't support the present government. It could fall, and then we would face the same problem all over again with the next bunch that comes in. We could link the arms with negotiations, but we don't even know who will negotiate with whom. I'll talk to (King) Faisal about getting negotiations started next week while I'm out there. In the meantime, I have a recommendation to send a group out there to size up the situation. Hummel can do it alone. He can talk quietly to them.
Amb. Hummel: I'm ready to go, but I need instructions.

Mr. Clements: Those people currently in control of the government, are they known to us in DOD?

Mr. Colby: We have their identities.

Mr. Clements: Yes, but do we know them?

Mr. Ellsworth: Some we do, some we don't.

Mr. Colby: 

Secretary Kissinger: Well, the fact is that the Ethiopian Army needs our arms.

Mr. Colby: The reality of this thing is that the first coup was effected by officers at the general level. The latest one was done by a bunch of people at the major level. They are an unsavory lot, just a bunch of radicals.

Secretary Kissinger: I have no real interest in who runs the government in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Colby: The real question is, who's the most moderate?

Secretary Kissinger: 

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Secretary Kissinger: Well, if anybody in Addis Ababa wants to talk to the Eritreans, I'm all for it. But, I don't think anything will come of it. Art (Amb. Hummel) would be the best one to take a look at the situation.

Mr. Hummel: Bill, (Mr. Colby) we just don't know what a successor government would look like, and we don't have the capability of going out and finding out.

Mr. Clements: Yeah, that's right. I say that we give them (the present government) some arms as a symbolic gesture and let the situation sift
itself out. If that present government fools around some more with that land reform idea of theirs, there are going to be a lot of landowners who are going to be mighty upset and they could urge the overthrow of that present bunch.

Secretary Kissinger: Well, I'll talk to the President tomorrow (February 28) about it and see what he wants to do (give arms or not). How quick could you get them there if we decide to go ahead?

Mr. Clements: We could get them there real quick -- by airlift.

Amb. Hummel: There are all kinds of means.

Mr. Clements: We'd keep as low a profile as possible.

Secretary Kissinger: Yes, but by what means?

Mr. Hummel: Ethiopia could airlift some of the stuff in from Europe. They have their own aircraft.

Mr. Ellsworth: A lot of the stuff could be taken in by regular MAC flights.

Secretary Kissinger: Well, you know we're not going to keep an airlift secret in this town.

Mr. Clements: I personally think that (King) Faisal fully expects us to do what we are talking about. The question is, who do we give it to?

Secretary Kissinger: Well, I think we need somebody out there to make an assessment of the situation.

Amb. Hummel: I'm ready to do the assessment, but I need instructions. If I go out there without instructions, my posterior will really be hanging out.

Secretary Kissinger: You'll be told -- tomorrow. But after that, can you get me an assessment?

Amb. Hummel: Yes.

Gen. Pauly: There's one other question. Do you want to bring out our people?

Secretary Kissinger: Yes, if we can keep our efforts at a modest level.