

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

President Nixon
Emperor Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia
Haile Minassie, Ethiopian Foreign Minister
Major General Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME: Tuesday, May 15, 1973
11:03 a.m. - 12:13 p.m.

PLACE: The Oval Office

[The press entered for photos.]

The President: You have been in this room more than any other Head of State. You were here in 1954. I met you first in 1957.

[The press left at 11:06.]

The President: The Foreign Minister is the highest paid interpreter we have ever had here. He speaks very good English.

Selassie: Not very much.

I wish to express my gratitude for your seeing me with your busy schedule. I am grateful for the friendly reception I have enjoyed in the United States. Friendship between the United States and Ethiopia will be strengthened by this visit.

Exchange of talks is useful among friends.

I would like you to visit Ethiopia. Ethiopia would like very much to welcome you.

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I am here on an urgent matter internationally, affecting the U.S. and Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean and Red Sea area.

There has been a change in the situation in our area. You are aware of it, but we feel it closer.

The balance of forces has changed radically because Soviet influence is expanding rapidly.

First, our objectives, I am sure, are in common: (1) Peace and security. (2) Freedom of navigation and access to natural resources. (3) There is the prospect of oil, safeguarded against possibility of enemy takeover.

We are cooperating in these areas and our forces, which you support, have always been used in the cause of peace.

We have common peace and common objectives. Soviet influence is expounding broadly. The reasons are: (1) To supersede the West in influence. (2) To gain control of the Red Sea and the commerce and resources of the area. Their methods are to strengthen the Arab states and weaken Ethiopia. Ethiopian cooperation with the West is not liked by the Arabs and by the Soviet Union.

The danger is a convergence of views of the Arabs and the Soviet Union. A minimum sacrifice on the part of the U.S. would prevent dangerous developments in the area.

The ELF is being supported.

Somalia has Soviet support for its territorial claims, and the Soviet Union is arming Somalia.

The position of Somalia is that wherever people speak Somalian they belong to Somalia. We respond that this is a problem for all of Africa as a result of boundaries drawn by the colonial powers. Therefore, African states have agreed to recognize the existing borders. Somalia is the only one that has not agreed to this formula. We have offered to provisionally demarcate the boundary under UN auspices. Somalia has refused, and is being armed to a dangerous extent. They have air bases, naval bases, and communication bases.

South Yemen has declared the Straits are Yemini territorial waters.

Somalia has claimed Djibouti. Most of the tribes are Ethiopian and the territory has traditionally been Ethiopian.

They have many more tanks. We have 20; they have 200. In APC's, we have 54; they have 310. We have no radar, they have a radar system. Our air forces is over age; they have seven MIG-21's and ten IL-28's. As for anti-aircraft batteries, we have 24 and they have 170. We have no rocket launchers and they have 24.

This is a deliberate policy of the Soviet Union to retard Ethiopia's development and force it to change its foreign policy.

Peace in the area has been maintained by Ethiopia. We are not an aggressive country. Our country is big; distances make things different. This change in the balance of power endangers peace because our security is threatened. If we suffer defeat and humiliation, it will be bad and it will also hurt American interests.

There are sabotage and probing actions by Somalia.

What would be the consequences of aggression? Some Arab states would aid Somalia. Two-three thousand Soviet Union advisors would be directing the battle against us with the latest weapons.

It used to be said that Ethiopia was superior; now it is different. We can't use our whole force against Somalia and they have all these modern weapons. We do not know the position of the United States in case of this kind of attack. Do we have contingency plans? What are your views? We propose emergency support for Ethiopia to restore the balance quickly.

Subsequently we have plans to strengthen our forces over the coming years.

It is true this hardware would impose a burden on us, but we can survive and it is important. We are really asking for replacements for aircraft and tanks to replace obsolescent ones. Therefore, the burden on Ethiopia is not unbearable, and our people are prepared for this burden.

I am sorry to burden you with this, but we have nowhere else to go. This is a real danger which is being built up.

I have three documents for you: One is a paper on what I have said. The second is a paper on our emergency plans. The third is our long-range plans for our armed forces.

On my way here I talked to President Sadat. He had a message. All he wants from Israel is the recovery of his territory.

He is not insane enough to think Israel should be thrown out of the area. He is prepared to open the Suez Canal in connection with the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

He told me of a plan to recognize the sovereignty of Egypt but to recognize the security interests of Israel. That's why he sent Ismail here. He said it was not satisfying because it would look as if we had only the fragment of sovereignty while Israel actually occupied the territory.

The President: We do share the same objectives in Africa ever since I can remember.

I will direct General Scowcroft to see that your military papers will be properly considered. I will have Rush look into it.

We have great difficulty with Congress with aid. We will again ask Congress for a substantial appropriation, but I must honestly say to you that getting it will be difficult. We are also making provisions for credit assistance in order to make up for this.

I will consider this very seriously, and to the extent I can get Congress to support, I will respond to your requests.

Ethiopia is a proud, peaceful country. Ever since 1935. It would be a tragedy if Ethiopia was subjected to new aggression. I will take up this matter when I meet with Brezhnev.

We cannot afford conflicts with the USSR over such areas of such value as the regions of the Middle East.

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I have no easy answers for President Sadat. I appreciate His Majesty's acting as a friend of the court. Egypt and Israel are far apart. I will keep His Majesty's message in mind as we proceed.

I share His Majesty's concern. I will analyze all requests with a sympathetic view. I can't promise, because of the Congress, but America is with you to the extent that I can speak for Americans.

Selassie: I thank you, Mr. President, for the kind words. I know the United States has problems throughout the world, with development, with other nations, etc. The magnitude of the problem varies in different areas.

I want to congratulate you on the bold actions in foreign affairs, for detente and what you have done to improve relations with enemies, for peace in the world.

I decided to come here to tell you of the problems in the Horn of Africa because of the growing problems, and the fact that aggression against Ethiopia is a Soviet policy. Escalation of action against Ethiopia is a definite policy.

I accept what you have said, that you would consider the sympathetically to support me. I don't ask for an answer now, but just to remind you of these developments, our needs, etc.

I know you will look into it and do whatever you can under the circumstances.

The Soviet Union knows our relationship. They are exerting serious pressure on our people to change our policy.

Not only the Soviet Union, but the Communist associates of the Soviet Union. We have only limited association with the Soviet Union. Our loan of 15 years ago is not fully used. We are on friendly terms with the Soviet Union but we are facing the Soviet Union. This has been forced on the United States.

I think I must go to the Soviet Union to tell them of the seriousness of this situation.

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We have taken steps to regularize relations with China and they are no longer against us.

We have solved the boundary problem with Egypt. It is Soviet policy which concerns us.

The President: It is always valuable to talk with His Majesty. I am happy we can continue to talk tonight at dinner.

[The meeting ended.]

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