

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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SPECIAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE

February 22, 1978

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Time and Place 3:30 p.m., The White House Situation Room

Subject: The Horn of Africa

Participants:

State  
Cyrus Vance  
Robert Moose, Assistant  
Secretary of State

JCS  
General David Jones,  
Acting Chairman

Defense  
Harold Brown  
Charles Duncan, Deputy  
Secretary of Defense

White House  
Zbigniew Brzezinski  
David Aaron, Deputy Assistant  
to the President for  
National Security Affairs

CIA  
Admiral Stansfield Turner

NSC  
Robert Gates (notetaker) *lg.*

MINUTES

Dr. Brzezinski asked David Aaron to review his mission to Ethiopia for the members of the SCC.

Mr. Aaron said that his visit and talks in Addis Ababa had been fairly fruitful and had maintained communication with the Ethiopian Government. His conversations had been very frank yet cordial. The Ethiopian strategic objective in receiving him had been to hold open a channel of communications and to work both sides (the United States and USSR). Their tactical objective was to keep the United States from supporting Somalia in the Ogaden. Also, he believed the Ethiopians were reluctant to see the Soviets regain their position in Somalia and noted that the Ethiopians had in the recent past rejected a regional confederation under Soviet auspices.

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classified by Zbigniew Brzezinski

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74

Mr. Aaron said he told Mengistu that the Soviets will become part of his problem and that their presence will cause other countries to react. At the same time, Mengistu had said that Ethiopia has no intention of crossing into Somalia. In this connection Mr. Aaron said he believes Mr. Mengistu understands the advantages to Ethiopia of being the victim in this situation.

Secretary Vance inquired whether Mengistu had meant "any crossing of the border" to which Mr. Aaron replied he believed that was exactly what Mengistu had meant. Mr. Aaron said he believed the Ethiopians would try to destroy Somali forces in the Ogaden so there would be no cross border problem. He also said that Mengistu wanted us to persuade the Somalis to withdraw and thereby peacefully resolve this issue.

said Ethiopia

Mr. Aaron reported that Mengistu would not interfere in other countries and would not become a base for Soviet operations elsewhere in the region. Mengistu tried to leave the impression that once the conflict is over and Somali forces are withdrawn from the Ogaden, the reason for Soviet and Cuban forces would be eliminated.

Mr. Aaron added that while he had told Mengistu we had not helped Somalia by providing military equipment, the Ethiopians countered by offering to provide serial numbers of U.S. equipment.

Mr. Aaron said that he had told Mengistu the U.S. would provide nonlethal equipment for which the Ethiopians had paid and added that Mengistu had been much taken by the idea of selling the lethal equipment purchased by Ethiopia back to us and using the proceeds to buy nonlethal equipment.

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Mr. Aaron concluded that the Soviets are in Ethiopia deeply and pervasively and that we face a long term problem. If we can help settle the Ogaden problem and dampen the Eritrean insurgency, we will help create conditions for diminution of the Soviet role. But we should be aware that the Soviets will be there as long as it takes the Ethiopians to learn how to use modern military equipment.

Secretary Vance said that Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin would be coming to see him that afternoon and asked how much he should be told.

Mr. Aaron suggested that Dobrynin probably has a full report on his visit and should be told mainly that the Ethiopians had confirmed what the Soviets had told him before.

Dr. Brzezinski briefly reviewed the remaining agenda for the meeting and began the discussion.

With respect to the Somali-Ethiopian war, he suggested that our UN initiative was not propitious. The Ethiopians regard it as hostile and other Africans are unenthusiastic. We should instead focus on the OAU.

Secretary Vance said this should be the case up to a point, but added there is nothing promising in the OAU effort either. We should wait and see what happens in Lagos.

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[REDACTED]

Dr. Brzezinski said that this sounded over-stated, that it was his impression that the response to our resolution was not hostile but rather regarded as possibly useful.

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[REDACTED]

He questioned whether it might be useful for the OAU to send a delegation from Tripoli to the Security Council.

Dr. Brzezinski inquired whether the OAU is prepared to do anything on its own?

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Mr. Moose said this was unlikely [REDACTED]

He added that Obasanjo has a penchant for peace making and that possibly a Presidential letter to him supporting [REDACTED] would be helpful.

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Secretary Vance said that the Saudis are unenthusiastic about overtures to Siad-Barre on this. Thus, he would be inclined to recommend something outside the Security Council. [REDACTED]

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Dr. Brzezinski inquired whether the Arab League -- especially Egypt and the Sudan -- could help. But Mr. Aaron replied that our Ambassador in the Sudan had told him not to count on the Sudanese.

Dr. Brzezinski asked whether we should press ahead with our resolution in the present form and forum.

Secretary Vance said that we could not do that, adding that the resolution requires much further refinement. He added he would not, however, rule out moving ahead in the UN in a week or so.


Dr. Brzezinski summarized the discussion as concluding that the United States should defer action on its UN Security Council resolution to see what the Nigerians might accomplish in the OAU or in the UN. We should encourage the Africans to go forward in the OAU effort and then, if it stalls, to take the issue into the UN. This would be better than for us to take the lead in the UN.

Secretary Brown asked if it was not a fact that the OAU would not produce and that the issue would be dumped in the UN?

Secretary Vance answered affirmatively, adding that this would probably happen in a week or two.

Mr. Aaron noted that the Ethiopians rejected our resolution because it attaches conditions to their sovereignty.

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Secretary Vance asked if we should encourage the Nigerians to go to the UN 

Dr. Brzezinski replied that it is in our interest to keep the issue in the OAU and force these countries to face the Soviet problem in Africa.

Secretary Vance said that this would depend upon how fast events move in the Ogaden.

Dr. Brzezinski suggested that no firm judgment is possible on this at this time and that events will guide it. He suggested that a confrontation of outsiders might well concern the OAU.

Mr. Aaron supported the idea of doing something with the OAU, and Secretary Vance said this might be done through the French, that is, force the OAU to face the question, let it become apparent that the organization cannot handle it, and then move the issue to the UN.

Mr. Aaron said with respect to our UN resolution that we should get the Africans to peddle it at the OAU -- Soviet/Cuban withdrawal for Somalian withdrawal.

Secretary Vance said that the Africans would not go for this.

Mr. Moose suggested that we should perhaps scale back our requirement for simultaneous withdrawal by both the Soviet/Cubans and the Somalis.

Dr. Brzezinski responded that we should let the Africans dilute our position rather than do it ourselves.

Mr. Aaron noted [REDACTED]

Secretary Vance again emphasized the importance of getting the French on board.

Dr. Brzezinski said that the situation has changed now and could become more protracted, particularly if the entrance of other Arabs into the conflict meant a confrontation of two different outside forces.

Secretary Brown asked in what way the other Arabs might become involved -- by providing arms?

Dr. Brzezinski said this would depend on whether the Somalis could hang on.

Admiral Turner observed that there is not much chance the Somalis can hold on in the North.

Secretary Vance concluded that we should go to the Nigerians and suggest that they raise our Security Council resolution in the OAU and push for its approval there. If this fails, then the Nigerians and perhaps other OAU members should take the issue to the UN. [REDACTED]

Secretary Vance asked Mr. Aaron whether Mengistu had offered a position with respect to stationing observers in the Ogaden?

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6

Mr. Aaron said he proposed to Mengistu a scenario involving a cease fire, prompt withdrawal of Somali forces and a stabilization of the situation and recognition of the frontier. They had not discussed observers and it was his impression that we could test that proposition with Mengistu only with a Somali commitment to withdraw.

Mr. Moose suggested that we go to Ethiopia and Somalia and try to persuade them not to oppose our UN resolution.

Mr. Aaron responded that Ethiopia would not support the resolution without a Somali commitment to withdraw.

Mr. Moose inquired whether that would be the case if the OAU approved the resolution, to which Mr. Aaron replied that it "might work."

#### Illicit Arms Transfers

Secretary Vance said that Ambassador West had talked to the Saudis about their providing U.S.-origin weapons to Somalia and had given them the serial numbers of this equipment. He said West had also spoken about Somali withdrawal.

Mr. Aaron reported that the Ethiopians had given us additional serial numbers as well. He added that there was a need for a high level approach to the Saudis indicating that the illegal transfer of arms could prejudice the sale of F-15s to Saudi Arabia.

Secretary Brown noted that this was particularly true inasmuch as the transfer undercuts our pledges to the Congress and others that Saudi Arabia would not use or transfer U.S.-origin weapons.

Dr. Brzezinski said that there were actually three arguments that should be made: (1) the transfer would prejudice the F-15; (2) it would provoke an outcry here in the United States; and (3) we do not oppose the Saudis transferring arms that are of non-U.S. origin.

Mr. Moose advised that legally we must inform the Congress of the diversions of U.S. origin weapons to Somalia, to which Dr. Brzezinski replied that we should tell the Saudis first.

Mr. Aaron said we should not rule out the possibility with respect to these weapons, that the Soviets might be making trouble

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7

He said that while this was unlikely, we should take steps to nail down for sure whether there have been transfers and if they are illegal.

Dr. Brzezinski said that it was important to put this approach in context and to assure the Saudis that the United States is not bugging out or washing our hands of the Horn. In fact, we should encourage the Saudis to send Somali non-U.S. origin arms.

Secretary Brown endorsed that view and Dr. Brzezinski said that Egyptian or French equipment might be available.

Mr. Aaron cautioned against giving the Somalis too much, to avoid giving the impression that we want them in the Ogaden. He added that we should say that if the Somalis withdraw from the Ogaden, we would not oppose the transfer of U.S. equipment if approved by the Congress.

Mr. Moose explained that the transfer of U.S. arms would be complicated legally. First, depending upon the agreements, our bilateral agreements would need to be amended (which is possible by Executive action). Second, we must then make the recipient country FMS eligible. Third, we can sell directly.

Dr. Brzezinski summarized the view of the group that the United States should go to the Saudis and make the following points:

- To provide evidence that U.S. origin arms have been provided by Saudi Arabia to Somalia and to express our concern about such transfers which are contrary to our bilateral agreements.
- To emphasize that such transfers could have a seriously adverse impact on F-15s for Saudi Arabia.
- To explain that we have no objection to supplying non-U.S. origin equipment to Somalia (particularly anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons).
- To advise that if Somalia is threatened with invasion after withdrawal from the Ogaden, the Administration would initiate action to provide third country arms transfers.

Mr. Aaron observed that the F-15s give us leverage with the Saudis. We should enlist their help in getting Somalia to withdraw, after

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8

which we would arrange arms transfers. He added, however, that all of this must happen very fast.

Secretary Brown asked whether we can be encouraging the transfer of non-U.S. origin weapons without Somali withdrawal from the Ogaden.

Dr. Brzezinski replied that we do not want to oppose the Saudis politically on the Horn.

Secretary Vance emphasized that we should provide no help to Somalia until it has withdrawn from the Ogaden. Further, we should tell the Saudis to stop their arms transfers until the Somalis are out.

Secretary Brown said that the Saudis may conclude in that event that we are totally uncooperative with respect to Somalia.

Dr. Brzezinski said we and the Saudis should make the Soviets and others think that victory will be difficult for them. Saudi money for arms will help in this regard.

Secretary Brown asked how fast new equipment could be bought and delivered to Somalia.

Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that speed would be important and that some equipment -- particularly anti-tank equipment -- could be flown in. He also noted that it would be unwise to give the impression that our only concern in the Horn is to prevent Somalia from getting U.S. arms.

Mr. Moose suggested that the best protection against invasion of Somalia would be world opinion, particularly in light of assurances by Mengistu and the Soviets.

Dr. Brzezinski replied that we must not create the impression in Saudi Arabia that we are isolating Somalia.

Secretary Brown suggested that we tell the Saudis that U.S. arms cannot now be transferred legally but we will not object if they buy non-U.S. arms elsewhere.

Dr. Brzezinski added that we should also say that if Somalia withdraws from the Ogaden, the U.S. would consider third country transfers to stabilize the situation.

Admiral Turner pointed out that the Somalis primarily need spare parts, instruction, logistical help, and leadership. He noted,

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an aside, that Soviet General Petrov is directing brigade-level operations.

Dr. Brzezinski said that the message to the Saudis outlined above should also be conveyed to the Iranians, Egyptians, and Pakistanis.

Secretary Vance noted that with these countries the first point would need to be altered inasmuch as there is no evidence now of illegal transfers.

#### U.S. Carrier Task Force

Secretary Vance noted that his view remained as before (opposed).

Secretary Brown said that sending a special task force without a specific purpose has likely negative consequences outweighing the advantages.

Dr. Brzezinski asked Secretary Brown what a task force could accomplish.

Secretary Brown replied that it could produce a presence which, when events turned out favorably, will be seen as contributing to that favorable outcome. On the other hand, if the outcome is unfavorable, the presence of the task force will be seen as a failure, thereby lessening the credibility of such task forces in other situations in the future. He added that the other use would be to prevent Soviet attack on arms transfers shipments to Somalia.

Dr. Brzezinski suggested that it might also have a confidence building role and suggested that if the Ethiopians do not cross the border, the task force will be viewed as having been successful.

Secretary Vance said he did not agree that the Ethiopians would not cross the frontier.

Dr. Brzezinski asked what if they did cross?

Secretary Brown said the task force could attack them but that he did not favor attacking forces crossing the border with the U.S. task force. He suggested that one alternative would be to go to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and suggest that they put a force into Somalia to deter Ethiopia from crossing the border and to support Siad-Barre politically. We would send a

task force to keep the Russians from attacking arms transfers shipments. He added, however, that there are two problems. If the countries in the region put forces into Somalia and then the Ethiopians come across the border and "kick the shit out of those forces," what do we do? Also, we will be asked about equipment. Do we authorize the use of U.S. equipment? The Secretary indicated that he would have said yes, until Mr. Moose spelled out how complicated that is. He would, however, favor replacement of equipment sent to Somalia but this would require the permission of Congress. He concluded that as long as Somalia is in the Ogaden there will be no support. With this truth, no one will send help.

Dr. Brzezinski said that a task force would have two purposes. The first would be to help Arab forces in Somalia but he added that this would appear to be a non-starter. Second, we could encourage Saudi Arabia to provide equipment, emphasizing that we are concerned and share their interest in not having Somalia overrun. They and others might deter the Ethiopians, once victorious in the Ogaden, from spilling over into Somalia. In these circumstances, a task force could be a confidence building measure, encouraging countries in the region that the U.S. is present, stands with them, will protect the flow of arms, and will provide protection from the Russians.

Secretary Brown commented that the Russians do not worry the Saudis, that the invasion won't be a Russian action. Thus, if Siad-Barre is overthrown or there is an invasion, all will say the task force failed.

Secretary Vance noted that we would be playing a bluff we cannot carry through.

Secretary Brown pointed out that the arrival of the U.S. aircraft carrier Enterprise in the Indian Ocean during the Indo-Pakistani war had been denounced by both sides.

Dr. Brzezinski said that the two situations are not parallel. In this instance, the purpose of the task force would be clearly anti-Soviet.

Mr. Aaron observed that the main thing Somalia needs is the wherewithal to cope with the air threat, that is, the Cuban-flown MIGs. Thus, we might consider a carrier in the context of asking Siad-Barre to withdraw from the Ogaden and defend his country from the border. In this event, we would move a carrier into the Indian Ocean and tell Siad-Barre that we would guarant

his territorial integrity and fight the Cubans.

Secretary Brown said he opposed this approach for both political and military reasons. In the latter case, the task force would make no difference; the former was politically indefensible.

Dr. Brzezinski said the task force should be there for political reasons, to make clear the serious consequences of an invasion. Also, it would provide military support if the Iranians or other outsiders provide air cover for Somalia. We should not engage the Ethiopians or Cubans directly. This would give confidence of U.S. support.

Secretary Vance said he opposed this politically. He added that we should emphasize a political settlement that would make it easier for Siad-Barre to withdraw. Then, if it were necessary to allow third country arms transfers, that would be okay. But we should keep our forces out.

Dr. Brzezinski asked Secretary Vance if he meant that the U.S. should do nothing in the event Ethiopia crossed the frontier?

Secretary Vance replied "yes."

Dr. Brzezinski suggested again that we go to the Saudis and Iranians and ask what they were prepared to do with us in the Horn.

Mr. Aaron added that the key is to link any action with withdrawal and reiterated that timing is important.

Admiral Turner observed that all of this could be academic in a very short time because there is likely to be a rout of Somali forces and there will be no Somali force to defend Somalia.

General Jones suggested that there would be heavy pressures on the Ethiopians to keep going once they reach the border. He added that once a task force is sent in, there will be much harder decisions afterward.

Dr. Brzezinski speculated that the President would decide against sending in a task force.

Secretary Brown again stated that if events came to a bad end in Somalia, the task force would have failed even if it had deterred the Soviets. He added that we should go ahead with the

consultations and find out what our friends are prepared to do in the area.

Dr. Brzezinski suggested that we then put in the task force and give assurances to our friends with respect to the Russians.

Secretary Brown said the question was still how to use the task force, a question we would be asked by our friends.

Mr. Moose noted that the best defense of Somali borders would be to advertise widely the assurances given by Mengistu and the Soviets.

Dr. Brzezinski said he was concerned about the effects of seeming U.S. passivity on Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Secretary Brown stated that no one in the Department of Defense supports fighting Cuban or Ethiopian aircraft. He added that what you (Dr. Brzezinski) want to deter -- the Russians -- do not need to be deterred.

Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that it is in our interest to get the Saudi Arabians and the Iranians into Somalia if it looks like the Somalis will be defeated.

Mr. Aaron added that the package for Somalia must include U.S. muscle.

Secretary Brown said he agreed with helping the Iranians and the Saudis if they are willing to go into Somalia. Then he would be willing to put in a carrier to protect them against the Soviets.

Dr. Brzezinski suggested that we go to these countries and ask whether, in the event of a Somali withdrawal, they would go in and provide air cover. In turn, we would say that the U.S. will go in and deter the Soviets.

Secretary Brown expressed the view that if we take this approach, Saudi Arabia and Iran will say no.

Secretary Vance said he was concerned about U.S. ships already in the Indian Ocean and going to Mombasa, Kenya.

Dr. Brzezinski said we should consider alternative plans for the ships already there.

Secretary Brown observed that if we go down the consultations path, the friendly countries will say we did not do enough and

and that the collapse of Somalia was the fault of the United States.

Secretary Vance suggested that we would be worse off with these friends if we encourage them to go in but refuse to answer their hard questions about our role.

Dr. Brzezinski said that our position would be that we will fight only the Soviets. The Saudi Arabians and the Iranians will have to match the Cubans.

Secretary Brown and General Jones jointly expressed the view that the Saudi Arabians and the Iranians, in fact, could not match the Cubans.

Secretary Vance said that Sadat would not put ground forces in Somalia.

Dr. Brzezinski stated that it is better for the record to get the negative response of the countries in the region and general agreement that nothing is to be done.


Secretary Brown noted that in the aftermath, these same countries will take a very different position.

Dr. Brzezinski again expressed his concern at the consequences both domestically and abroad of doing nothing.

Mr. Aaron commented that the presence of Arabs in Somalia would make the withdrawal of the Cubans even harder.

#### Other Responses to Soviets and Cubans

Dr. Brzezinski asked what might be done to raise the cost of involvement for the Soviets and Cubans?

Secretary Vance suggested 

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Dr. Brzezinski inquired whether there was something in the U.S.-Soviet bilateral area that might be done.

Secretary Brown said there might be some further negative action in the Indian Ocean talks.

Dr. Brzezinski asked whether something might be done in the areas of space and technology.

Secretary Brown said that cooperation in the future space shuttle might be used but that he felt this was really a different compartment.

Mr. Aaron said that the only item in the political agenda that might deter the Soviets would be SALT.

Dr. Brzezinski asked if we might be more flexible on technology transfer to China?

Secretary Brown said that would certainly get their attention.

Dr. Brzezinski said he thought the Soviets would be indifferent to the SALT price and that if they were going to be indifferent to our sensitivities, we should do likewise vis-a-vis China.

Secretary Brown indicated that he was moderately favorable to that idea.

Secretary Vance emphasized that he disagreed with Dr. Brzezinski on the final implications of an Ethiopian crossover to Hargeisa.

Secretary Brown said he agreed with Dr. Brzezinski's analysis of the consequences in the short run but with Secretary Vance in the long run.

Mr. Aaron advised that we be cautious about what we say in the event of Ethiopia's crossover of the border in hot pursuit. We must face the danger of the Soviets going into southern Africa as a result of the internal settlement in Rhodesia. We need contingency planning.

Secretary Vance said he hated to see Somalia characterized as a friend that we are letting down.

Secretary Brown responded that we could not, however, let the Soviets fish in troubled waters.

Secretary Vance said we should take each case on its own.

Dr. Brzezinski said that he foresaw immediate regional and international consequences to an invasion of Somalia and that this action would contribute to uncertainty and destabilization in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. The lesson they would learn is that if they are in a contest, they should not get caught relying on the United States. Further, a successful invasion would be an example of yet another time that Cuban forces were decisive.

Secretary Vance replied that he would not put any U.S. troops in Africa.

Dr. Brzezinski said we should get the regional powers to act and "make the Soviets and Cubans bleed."

Mr. Moose cautioned that a huge train of legislative action would be required to get help to Somalia, adding that we in fact have almost no options.

Dr. Brzezinski said it will be important to have tried to help.

Mr. Aaron added that this situation might help us to get the law on third country transfers changed.

Dr. Brzezinski then summarized the recommendations of the SCC, including:

-- We should rely on the OAU to press for some sort of negotiated settlement but not exclude the United Nations.

-- We should approach the Saudis, Iranians, and Pakistanis to point out that arms transfers of U.S. origin are illegal, that such illegal assistance could have a serious impact on future U.S. arms sales, that we do not object to their providing non-U.S. origin equipment to Somalia and that we would consider authorizing third country arms transfers if Somalia is threatened with invasion after withdrawing from the Ogaden.

-- We are disagreed whether to recommend deployment of a U.S. carrier task force but agree that we should proceed with consultations with regional powers; and

-- With respect to other actions against the USSR and Cuba we see no direct linkage with other bilateral matters but are willing to consider further steps with respect to space cooperation and technology transfers to the Chinese. (Secretary Vance reserved his position on the latter.)

Mr. Aaron added at the conclusion of the meeting that the United States should be as forthcoming as possible with a Kenyan delegation coming to the United States. All agreed with this view.

Mr. Moose said that we should tell the Somalis and the Arabs what we are planning to do with regard to providing Ethiopia with nonlethal spare parts.

Secretary Vance noted that we will provide two C-130 aircraft to Somalia and asked whether this should be announced. All

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16

agreed with Mr. Aaron's recommendation that we let ride for a while any publicity relating to this.

Secretary Vance recommended that Mr. Aaron call Senator Sparkman and Congressman Zablocki to report on his trip to Ethiopia.

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