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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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March 27, 1978

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

FROM: PAUL B. HENZE *[Signature]*

SUBJECT: Meeting with Saudi Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abd-al-Rahman Al-Mansouri, in Jeddah, 10:00 P.M.-Midnight, 23 March 1978

After listening to Dick Moose's account of what we had experienced in Mogadiscio, Al-Mansouri commented:

"Don't you think you went to Somalia too soon? It was awkward for Siad Barre to receive you at this time, especially when you had so little to offer him. What you are ready to give him he can get from anyone in the Gulf. He does not strengthen himself politically by dealing with you now unless you are willing to rearm him with planes and tanks and everything else he says he needs."

He then went on to declare:

"I am tired of Somalia. We have wasted a lot of time and money on it and we have nothing to show for it. We do not care about the Ogaden. We are only interested in Communism in this region. We want the Soviets and Cubans out of Ethiopia. If Ethiopia could become moderate, we would support her immediately. We would forget about Eritrea. Our strategy is to keep Communism from expanding in this region and push it out. Everything else we do is tactics."

Reflecting on the events of the past year, he admitted that the Saudis had encouraged Siad to go into the Ogaden--because they had been persuaded that this would bring down Mengistu:

"We did not care who had the Ogaden; we only wanted Mengistu defeated. If the Russians and Cubans had not come in to help him, he would have been defeated."

Later in the conversation I said I had found in Ethiopia that the Somali invasion had strengthened Mengistu. I gave him a brief summary of David's meeting with Mengistu and our view that it was useful to preserve openings to Ethiopia. He replied:

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"We will do anything you can convince us makes sense to get Communism out of Ethiopia. When Ethiopia is moderate, there will be no difficulty with the Eritreans. We will give them no support. We do not care about Somalia. We do not want to waste more money on it unless we see that you have a strategy for the whole area that will get the Russians and the Cubans out."

He had opened the conversation by telling us that he had already had a report from their ambassador in Mogadiscio whom the Somalis had told they were unhappy with our mission. Our two-hour talk with Al-Mansouri ended with a very qualified response to Dick Moose's direct appeal for Saudi generosity toward Siad:

"Siad," Al-Mansouri said, "is not a Communist and not a moderate-- he is in power and wants to stay in power. But we have already given the Somalis a great amount of money. We are not happy about giving them more but if you convince us that it is a good idea to do something more for them to help weaken the Russians and the Cubans in the region, then we can help. But first we want to talk with you about how you see the whole strategy in this region. We do not want to waste money on tactics unless they are part of a strategy. We do not want to wait 20 years for the Ethiopians to get tired of the Russians."

Comment:

Al-Mansouri's view of what has happened in the Horn and what is possible there now is full of oversimplifications but his basic thinking is sophisticated and purposeful. His approach to the Horn is free of sentimentality about Siad and crassly realistic about Somali territorial ambitions. His supple mind is ready to explore new paths toward our objectives in the Horn.

We ought to do the same. I come back from the Horn with a strengthened conviction that we may be making a mistake by trying to bolster Siad at all, or in centering our approach around Somalia. Anything we do there militarily is likely to make it easier for the Russians and Cubans to entrench themselves in Ethiopia. Somali nationalism is the most disruptive force in the Horn. Any power who becomes associated with it is doomed to disappointment.

Siad's unenthusiastic response to the approach we have just made to him gives us an opportunity to be a little more imaginative about what we might try to do in the Horn. Let us, e.g. consider the thesis that we might achieve our ultimate objectives in the Horn sooner if we let the Russians take back Somalia (or at least be seen as trying to do so). The resulting strains that could seethe up in their relationship with Ethiopia--especially if they go on being totally identified with Mengistu--might propel it back into a relationship with the West more readily than any enticement we could offer or pressure we could exert.

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I found our talk in Jeddah more stimulating than anything else we experienced in the nine days we were out. We should arrange to have more comprehensive talks with the Saudis when we have reflected a bit on the limitations and consequences of what we are currently doing in the Horn.

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Summary of a meeting between U.S. officials Paul B. Henze and Richard M. Moose, and Saudi Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Abd-al-Rahman Al-Mansouri regarding Saudi Arabian policy toward Ethiopia and Somalia. National Security Council, 27 Mar. 1978. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, [tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4rjqC4](http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4rjqC4). Accessed 21 May 2017.