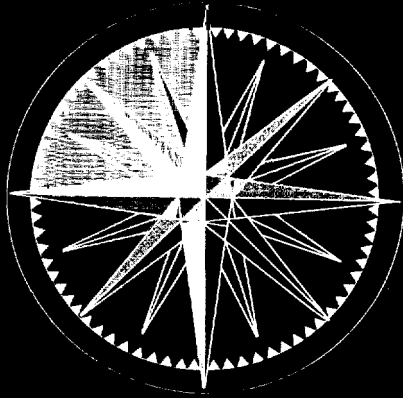


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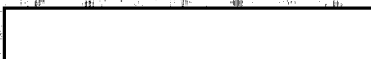
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SPECIAL REPORT

THE SUCCESSION PROBLEM IN ETHIOPIA

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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THE SUCCESSION PROBLEM IN ETHIOPIA

Emperor Haile Selassie, now 73, has wielded absolute control over Ethiopia for more than three decades. His wide popularity with the masses, his international renown, and his political acumen have kept in check the country's sharp ethnic, religious, political, and social differences. His reputation as a fearless military leader has also helped him transform Ethiopia's diverse provincial territories into a centralized state. The job is not finished, however; his government is becoming more complex and difficult to control while he is getting older--and perhaps less alert--and is becoming the target of mounting criticism.

Against this background, the continued stability of Ethiopia may hang upon a peaceful and effective succession to the Emperor. The heir apparent, the present Crown Prince, does not appear to have the aggressiveness to rule with absolute power. His accession--if it takes place--will probably signal a long period of political maneuvering by diverse elements, none of them strong enough to win a quick victory. At that time, desperately needed reforms and modernization will be even further retarded.

The Emperor and the Crown

The Emperor's formal title--Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Haile Selassie I, Elect of God, Emperor of Ethiopia--reflects the mystique of his legendary descent from the house of David and Solomon, his divine consecration by the Coptic Christian Church, and his absolute political power. His wisdom, combined with police state control, have served to hold the empire together.

Haile Selassie has outlived his wife, most of his children, most of his trusted advisers, and, to some extent, the struc-

ture he manipulates to stay in power. He has centralized his control over a greater area than his predecessors largely by personal discipline, ruthlessness, courage, and an ability to pit his rivals against each other.

Haile Selassie became Regent in 1916--when his predecessor was deposed for flirting with Islam--and Emperor in 1930. The Emperor's struggle to lead his country out of isolation and into the modern world has been accompanied by his attempt to allay historic uncertainty over the process of succession.

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In Ethiopia, the crown has always been widely respected as an institution, and depended upon as a source of paternalistic justice and authority. Loyalty in Ethiopia, however, is personal, not ideological, and has traditionally accrued to the individual strong enough to command it within the institutional framework of the throne. His Imperial Majesty devoted 36 of 131 articles in the 1955 constitution to defining the imperial establishment. The constitution, however, remains little more than a blueprint and is unlikely to determine the succession. Any occupant of the throne is dependent not only upon the constitution, but also upon the clergy and a blood link to the Solomonic legend for mass public confirmation.

The Crown Prince

Asfa Wossen was born 27 July 1916. As a child, when his father's position was in danger, he was given refuge in the British Legation for six months. Named Crown Prince in 1930, he spent the years of the Italian invasion and World War II with his family in England. His English education and British friends caused him to be regarded in the 1950s as ostentatiously pro-British. The US ambassador recently described the Crown Prince as basically much more Western oriented than his father, and able to talk on a variety of subjects, but without a detailed knowledge of Ethiopian affairs. He is also believed to lack the forceful character and the autocratic inclination of his father. The

Crown Prince is largely isolated from Ethiopian leaders, and he plays no role in the government.

Although neither the Emperor nor the people like the Crown Prince personally, at present there appears to be no individual or group in Ethiopia capable of blocking his accession. The church, army, nobility, young elite, and provincial officials would support him, not so much because the 1955 constitution establishes his succession, but because the Crown Prince is suited by inclination and temperament to the role of a constitutional monarch. Most of these elements apparently believe they can manipulate him to serve their own ends. Over the long term, the Crown Prince probably will become a figurehead, if he remains in power.

Other Possible Successors

Should the Crown Prince step out of the picture, the succession might fall on one of the Emperor's two grandsons. One is Iskender Desta, 31, deputy commandant of the navy and the son of one of the Emperor's daughters. The other is Prince Paul, son of the Emperor's favorite second son. Prince Paul was adopted by the Emperor after his father's death and was named Duke of Harar in 1959. The Emperor made his own way to the throne via the Dukedom of Harar. This year Prince Paul will be 18 years old, a constitutional prerequisite for any crown prince. Sons of the present Crown Prince are much younger.

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If the royal lineage requirements for succession provided for in the constitution were not adhered to, hundreds of Ethiopians could, by blood alone, justify a claim to the throne. Two aristocrats appear most likely to be able to marshal the necessary support. One is Megesha Seyoum, governor general of Tigre Province. He is scion of the royal house of Tigre, historically the strongest challenger to the Emperor's royal house of Shoa. The other is Asrate Kassa, present governor general of Eritrea Province. He has as good a claim to the throne as the present Crown Prince and has frequently been listed among the Crown Prince's loyal friends. Asrate Kassa is egocentric, ambitious, and capable of organizing if the project is not too complicated.

navy is insignificant. The police force, nearly as large as the army, is too dispersed and too lethargic to be significant in the power structure, but mobile commando units are now being organized.

The chief of staff has admitted that because of antiquated and chaotic reporting procedures, no one really knows how many men are in the army. Estimates vary from 28,000 to 32,000. The army's morale and effectiveness suffer from poor organization, lack of logistical support, and too many officers who should be retired. Even so, the army is the most powerful element in Ethiopia, and any successor to Haile Selassie will have to reckon with it. The Emperor professes an ardent desire to improve the army, but he probably does not intend to create a really efficient force which could endanger his position.

The Armed Forces

The armed forces constitute the most important of the three principal sources of power in Ethiopia. The others are the Coptic Christian Church and the nobility. The army dominates the military forces, the only politically significant organizations on a national scale in Ethiopia. The air force, although better trained and equipped, is limited by size to an auxiliary role, and the

The Ruling Establishment

The members of the ruling Ethiopian establishment are composed largely of the plateau-dwelling Amhara and Tigre peoples--who represent less than 30 percent of the population. They are the heirs of a centuries-old culture and control almost all the sources of power.

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The establishment can be divided into two broad categories, traditionalists and modernists. The traditionalists typify the majority of the population of Ethiopia, regardless of geographic, ethnic, or religious differences, and they are almost entirely uneducated. They include the peasantry, virtually the entire priesthood and hierarchy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, lower- and-middle-level gentry, military personnel, and even some nobles and landed aristocracy. The traditionalists are loyal to the Emperor and to the concept of the throne, and have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Generally they are nationalistic and xenophobic.

The modernists, numbering between 5,000 and 10,000 but constantly increasing, have been exposed to education and modern political ideas, mostly Western. These individuals were selected for education by the Emperor and then placed in the government bureaucracy and military officer corps. Both military and civilian modernists vary greatly in their zeal for reform, however, and family and ethnic differences keep them from being a monolithic group. Some, such as the older generation which managed to get an education before or during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, are essentially conservative. Although this element is small due to the Italians' deliberate wartime policy of eradicating the Ethiopian intelligentsia, its members occupy most top civilian and military positions in today's govern-

ment. They are not totally opposed to change, but they are determined to control it in order to safeguard their own positions.

Two main conservative cliques have been apparent within the modernists for many years. One is currently led by Prime Minister Aklilou Habte Wold, and the other by Asrate Kassa, governor general of Eritrea, and General Merid Mengesha, the minister of defense. Both cliques have educated individuals from various subdivisions in and out of the nobility. Both include civilian and military leaders, although the prime minister's group is heavily weighted toward the civilian side.

The Emperor has carefully balanced these groups and individuals against each other for over a decade. He has so effectively stifled initiative that no leader capable of directing their discontent into serious political action has emerged. Both groups support the monarchy and Haile Selassie personally, while pressing him for reforms which would increase their power and influence. When the Emperor goes, these cliques will probably unite to maintain the monarchy, probably by installing the Crown Prince, while a bitter power play takes place behind the scenes.

The reformist modernists are generally younger. They acquired their education since the post-Italian restoration of the

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Emperor in 1941. Most of them were educated in England, but the number educated in Ethiopia and elsewhere is increasing. Relatively few Ethiopians have received Communist education, and so far none of these has achieved high office. Most reformists are in the middle and lower echelons of government or military service, although the number of those who are--or have been--in top positions is increasing. Reformists are becoming evident in the Haile Selassie I University, the press, and private business.

Reformists are frustrated and impatient with the Emperor's slowness in implementing the reforms dimly foreshadowed by the 1955 constitution. Proud of Ethiopia's millennium of independence, they are embarrassed that their country lags behind far younger African nations in political, economic, and social progress. Reformists acknowledge the necessity of retaining the throne as a symbol of national unity, however. If the Emperor continues to increase his stature as an African leader, even the most radical-minded reformers may hesitate to recommend his removal or even press successfully for rapid changes.

The rest of the population is either Moslem or pagan. The concentration of Moslem elements in the lowland periphery of the Amhara-Tigre highlands has for centuries haunted the establishment with fears of Moslem encirclement. Ethnic Somalis, for example, occupy about one fifth of Ethiopia, and the restive northern province of Eritrea is at least half Moslem.

The December 1960 Coup Attempt

The Emperor's aura of semi-divinity, his personification of the state, and the myth of imperial infallibility were badly damaged by the Imperial Body Guard's attempt to place the Crown Prince on the throne in December 1960. Naively planned and poorly executed, the revolt was crushed when support from the army failed to materialize. The Emperor hurried back from Brazil and quickly faced down the rebels.

For some time thereafter the Emperor had grave doubts about the loyalty of the Crown Prince. Apparently he eventually believed the latter's explanation that he was in effect the prisoner of the conspirators, and that his seeming collusion came from the knife they held to his back and his desire to preserve the monarchy when the coup appeared at first to be succeeding. The Emperor dealt harshly with the conspirators, and soon dashed any hopes that he would implement reforms.

In April 1961, the Emperor's "Delegation of Authority" speech urged ministers and other officials to shoulder responsibility for running the government while he pledged to confine himself to policy. The speech evoked cynicism and despair from the young educated elite, who are aware that Ethiopia is still governed without reforms and without delegation of authority. However, the Emperor's dependence upon the army to save him served to make the rank and file, as well as the officer corps,

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increasingly conscious of their power. The Emperor's subsequent capitulation to the army's demand for pay raises has reinforced this feeling.

Recent Pressures

During the past two years pressures for reform have intensified. Top military and civilian leaders went so far as to present a petition to the Emperor in 1963, calling for a decentralization of power and a real delegation of authority to cabinet ministers. In 1964, middle- and lower-level army personnel demanded another pay raise. The Emperor ignored the petition for authority, but did yield on the pay raise issue. Such a success, especially by younger elements, may encourage greater boldness.

During the past year, coup plots and petitions favoring reform have appeared with some regularity. No military or civilian leader has yet emerged, and no significant cohesion has developed among the Emperor's critics. In addition, internal pressure for reform has been fairly well obscured by the Somalia-Ethiopia border dispute, Eritrean dissidence, aid negotiations, and Pan-African matters.

The resignation of the Ethiopian ambassador to the United States in early 1965, while relatively insignificant in itself, again focused attention in Addis Ababa on internal affairs. The Emperor displayed unusual nervousness over the attention given

by the young educated elite to the fact that the ambassador resigned in protest against the Emperor's failure to institute internal reforms.



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Government control in the provinces has slipped to the point where both police and army forces have been taxed to maintain internal security. Clashes with Somali nomads, who winter in about one fifth of Ethiopia, are less serious than at the time of the February 1964 "war" with Somalia, but they are continuing, and no solution to the basic problem is in sight. In the northern province of Eritrea, absorbed into the Empire in 1962, unrest has become so troublesome that the Emperor resorted to the unusual, and dangerous, step of granting the governor general substantial authority to deal with the situation. In the southern provinces of Bale and Sidamo, Ethiopian attempts to control tribal disruptions and assert Amhara hegemony have created severe unrest.

This year, the widening contrast between the slow economic and social development in the provinces and the rapid

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urbanization of Addis Ababa has so exacerbated differences between the ruling minority and the other tribes and peoples that the Emperor has ordered that no public media may mention the name of any tribal group or association. There are no political parties and no organizations for political activity, but labor and student organizations are close to attaining national scope that will cut across tribal, religious, and other traditional patterns. Unless handled with increasing firmness, they may soon become major factors in the political scene.

Outlook

Only the Emperor's power and astuteness have kept the empire from fragmenting. Without his wisdom and absolute control, no one could have introduced reforms at such a leisurely, evolutionary pace while keeping political agitation far below that in most other developing nations. Even he may be hard pressed to continue this performance.

None of the possible successors is likely to be initially able or willing to employ the same repressive tactics. The Crown Prince will probably receive initial support from most Ethiopians, who feel that destruction of the monarchy would bring chaos. However, he is likely to become a constitutional monarch initially, and possibly a figurehead for whatever group is able to attain real power. The absence of rigid central control during any power struggle is likely to encourage many groups and cliques to attempt to assert themselves. The result will almost surely be a period of political instability and possibly disorder. No group presently on the scene appears capable of quickly gaining control. Much will depend upon the timing and circumstances of the Emperor's departure from effective rule. The longer he remains in control the better the chances for constitutional monarchy and parliamentary government to succeed him.

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