

**Secret**

25X1



DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# *WEEKLY SUMMARY*

## *Special Report*

*Ethiopia: Problems of a Fading Dynasty*

State Dept. review completed.

**Secret**

**№ 43**

3 July 1969  
No. 0377/69B

**Page Denied**

## ETHIOPIA: PROBLEMS OF A FADING DYNASTY

Emperor Haile Selassie will arrive in the US on 7 July for his fourth official visit. As regent and emperor since 1916, he has become a symbol of order and stability in the oldest and one of the most backward of Africa's independent countries. He has imposed a measure of stability on Ethiopia that is in sharp contrast with the violence and turmoil that have marked that country's history. The prestige he has attained as a world figure and as an elder statesman of Africa has brought considerable foreign economic and military assistance to help him modernize the country and gain international standing for Ethiopia.

Although Haile Selassie's highly personalized style of rule has enabled him to remain in power and to control all aspects of the government apparatus and the military establishment, he has failed to prepare anyone to succeed him as he enters his waning years. The reforms he has introduced have set in motion forces that he is no longer able to control. Student unrest is intensifying, discontent is strong among the educated elite, and the government is being hurt financially by budgetary difficulties and by the rising costs of combating insurgency.

### THE IMPERIAL SYSTEM

When Haile Selassie became regent in 1916, the Ethiopian Empire was little more than a collection of squabbling kingdoms whose ruling strong men were under little if any control by the reigning monarch in Addis Ababa. As regent, he used armed force and palace intrigue to eliminate or neutralize various contenders for power until 1930, when he himself became emperor. During this period, Haile Selassie also established his reputation as a modernizer, particularly in the area of foreign relations. Through personal contacts abroad, and by such efforts as gaining membership for Ethiopia in the League of Nations in 1923, he clearly showed his intent to embark on an activist foreign policy. He has pursued this goal throughout his 53-year rule.

Haile Selassie's accession to the throne in 1930 was marked not only by the beginning of effective government control from Addis Ababa, but also by the Emperor's personal commitment to achieving economic and social change. His efforts were interrupted by the Italian invasion in

1936, but were intensified following his return from exile in 1941. A national army responsive to him personally replaced the local forces of the traditional leaders, who were also deprived of their independent powers of taxation. A government bureaucracy was established, and a system of provincial administration was inaugurated, both staffed with loyal appointees. Completely on his own initiative, the Emperor instituted a constitution in 1955 that established a popularly elected lower house of parliament. National elections have been held regularly ever since. A national education system, virtually nonexistent until the late 1940s, is now operating in parts of Ethiopia, and a national university is expanding.

The Emperor's ambitious diplomatic efforts have assured Ethiopia a continuing flow of foreign loans, assistance, and technicians from a wide variety of free world and Communist countries. His objectives of leading Ethiopia away from its isolationist past, protecting Ethiopia's territorial integrity, and assuming for himself a prestigious place in world and African affairs have been

SECRET

25X1

largely realized. Moreover, Ethiopia's military contributions to United Nations forces in Korea and the Congo, the Emperor's almost single-handed founding of the Organization of African Unity and his role of mediator in the Algerian-Moroccan border war in 1963, together with his continuing efforts to mediate the Nigerian civil war, have given him world-wide prestige.

#### EVOLUTION INSTEAD OF REVOLUTION

Haile Selassie has been far more receptive to change than others of his generation who are still active and in positions of influence in Ethiopia. His fame has been achieved by his unusual personal vigor and determination, his long tenure, and his exceptional ability to make effective use of his immense personal power at critical moments. Even these qualities, however, have not been enough to overcome the basic conservatism of all but a relatively small group of modernist Ethiopians, and the Emperor has faced many internal obstacles in implementing even limited reforms. Consequently, he has moved cautiously, maneuvering between the conservatives and those who press for faster progress, and attempting to promote change through evolution.

Above all else, however, he wants to preserve the traditional political and social framework of Ethiopia—even at the cost of progress. The Ethiopian Empire itself dates back into murky antiquity. Its political, cultural, and religious traditions are largely those of the ruling element that Haile Selassie represents: the Amhara and closely related Tigray people who constitute only about 30 percent of Ethiopia's approximately 24 million people. The Amhara are proud, aggressive, and fiercely independent. They occupy the mountainous highlands of central Ethiopia and, except for the Italian occupation, have been able to resist numerous attempts at conquest by Muslim and other foreign invaders.

Other peoples dwelling within the country's boundaries have long been ruled by the Amhara, who have assimilated some of them but more often have simply sought to impose—with varying degrees of success—their own feudal-like culture and Christian religion. Haile Selassie has had some success in instilling a sense of nationhood among Ethiopians although always maintaining Amhara supremacy. Some minority groups in the outer areas of the empire are governed harshly, however. They remain basically hostile to the central government and are the source of continuing security problems.

Around this framework, Haile Selassie has tacked a veneer of Western political institutions that he seems to believe will eventually become meaningful under his guidance. Political parties are prohibited, however, and the government exercises strict censorship. But the key to holding Ethiopia's political and social patchwork together has always been the Emperor's particular style of leadership. He has mastered and refined all the techniques of manipulating individuals, the government apparatus, and the military. He has retained the backing of the highly conservative Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Amhara land-owning aristocracy, whose support is essential to the monarchy. At the same time, he has balanced, fragmented, or suppressed rival factions within their ranks when they opposed him. Haile Selassie also stands at the center of a web of competing private and official intelligence networks that keep him informed of possible plots against him and of the goings on within the intrigue-filled atmosphere of the capital.

The reforms and changes Haile Selassie has introduced, however, have now produced a number of problems that pose an increasing challenge to his rule, and it is becoming more difficult for him to manage the affairs of the country in his

SECRET

**SECRET**

25X1

old style. The government is in financial difficulties, and economic development is bogged down. There are also problems in the armed forces. Discontent within the Amhara ruling establishment and the bureaucracy is growing, and student unrest is intensifying. Insurgency on the periphery of the empire continues to be of pressing concern and is becoming more costly to combat.

While the Emperor wears his 76 years well and is capable of working long hours and of making exhausting trips abroad, the government itself has slowed into immobility. The cabinet and bureaucracy now seem unable to focus closely or respond quickly, especially on complicated domestic problems, and Haile Selassie spends more and more time on foreign affairs.

#### GOVERNMENT FINANCES AND THE ECONOMY

Ethiopia has been gradually overextending itself financially to keep pace with rising security and development costs. Despite some significant achievements, however, economic development in general has barely scratched the surface. The economy continues to be shackled by highly conservative financial policies and by the near-feudal social structure. The prerogatives of the Amhara aristocracy, the ownership of choice land by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the outmoded systems of land tenure have kept agricultural output well below Ethiopia's rich potential. Simultaneously, expenditures for military purposes have been rising as the government has relied on costly military measures to control large areas of the country.

There appears to be no lack of foreign aid funds for more intensive development, however. A US Embassy survey of April 1969 shows that at the end of 1968 there was a total of some \$100 million in undisbursed aid from free world sources available to the government. Also, most



Emperor Haile Selassie

of the \$100 million Soviet credit granted in 1959 still has not been used. Standing in the way of the effective use of foreign aid, however, are the primitive tax structure and an inability to mobilize savings so that the government can generate its own revenue to hold up its end of specific aid projects.

The Emperor himself is partly responsible for this poor economic performance. Government ministers, unable to establish their own priorities, have to divert funds at the Emperor's bidding. More important, the fact that Haile Selassie for political reasons has not pressed vigorously for land reform is one of the main barriers to economic development. A Ministry of Land Reform has been in existence since 1966, for example, but only halting steps have been taken. The Emperor is unlikely to push harder in this direction for fear of undermining the Amhara land-owning system and, indirectly, the monarchy itself.

An accumulation of budgetary difficulties more noticeably severe than in the past brought about a serious financial crisis earlier this year and belatedly focused the government's attention on

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

25X1

its economic problems. The bureaucracy's economic planning apparatus was strengthened following cabinet changes last February, but the new cabinet has not yet produced any long-range corrective measures, and it is questionable that it will. Despite clear warning, Haile Selassie will probably not consent to any serious economic reforms that might have the side effect of stimulating demands for political reform.

#### PROBLEMS WITH THE ARMED FORCES

With Ethiopia's long history of foreign invasions and internal violence always in mind, Haile Selassie has built a large national army and has consistently given top priority to its modernization. The need for the army to maintain order in the provinces, together with the government's anxiety over Soviet activities in the Middle East, the Red Sea Basin, Sudan, and Somalia, keeps defense spending the largest item in the national budget. By African standards, the army is well trained and equipped. The US provides the major portion of arms and training for the 37,000-man army and for the small but well-trained and jet-equipped air force. As a quid pro quo for the Kagnew communications base in Asmara, the US has provided military assistance worth slightly over \$135 million since 1953, Washington's largest expenditure of this type in Africa.

Apart from its defense role, the army is the key prop by which Haile Selassie keeps himself in power. His control of the military is essential, for plotting among them has been a chronic threat to political stability. The two most recent and serious threats to the Emperor originated in the army. These were the Imperial Bodyguard's abortive coup of 1960 and a plot in 1964 that was nipped in the planning stage. Accordingly, the Emperor constantly maneuvers to keep the military establishment divided and politically impotent, but at a reasonable level of efficiency. Nevertheless, by acquiring modern arms and

training, the army has in fact attained a position of strength second only to the Emperor's.

Haile Selassie's subordination of military efficiency to the neutralization of possible military rivals has been costly, however. The high command has been kept so fragmented by the Emperor's divide-and-rule manipulations that there is doubt that the army could move quickly or effectively in a moment of crisis. Haile Selassie's controls have fanned unrest and frustration among educated lower- and middle-level officers, many of whom have been trained in the US. They chafe at the Emperor's tolerance of loyal but incompetent generals, slow promotions, the inefficiency that pervades the armed forces, and at the lack of progress toward economic and political reform in the country.

The army is also ill equipped to deal with the insurgency problem should it worsen. For obvious reasons, the Emperor has only reluctantly permitted some counterinsurgency training for officers, and the army has been left to operate by ill-suited means and uninspired leadership. Morale is a serious problem, especially among units stationed for long periods in desolate areas of the Ogaden and Bale.

#### INSURGENCY

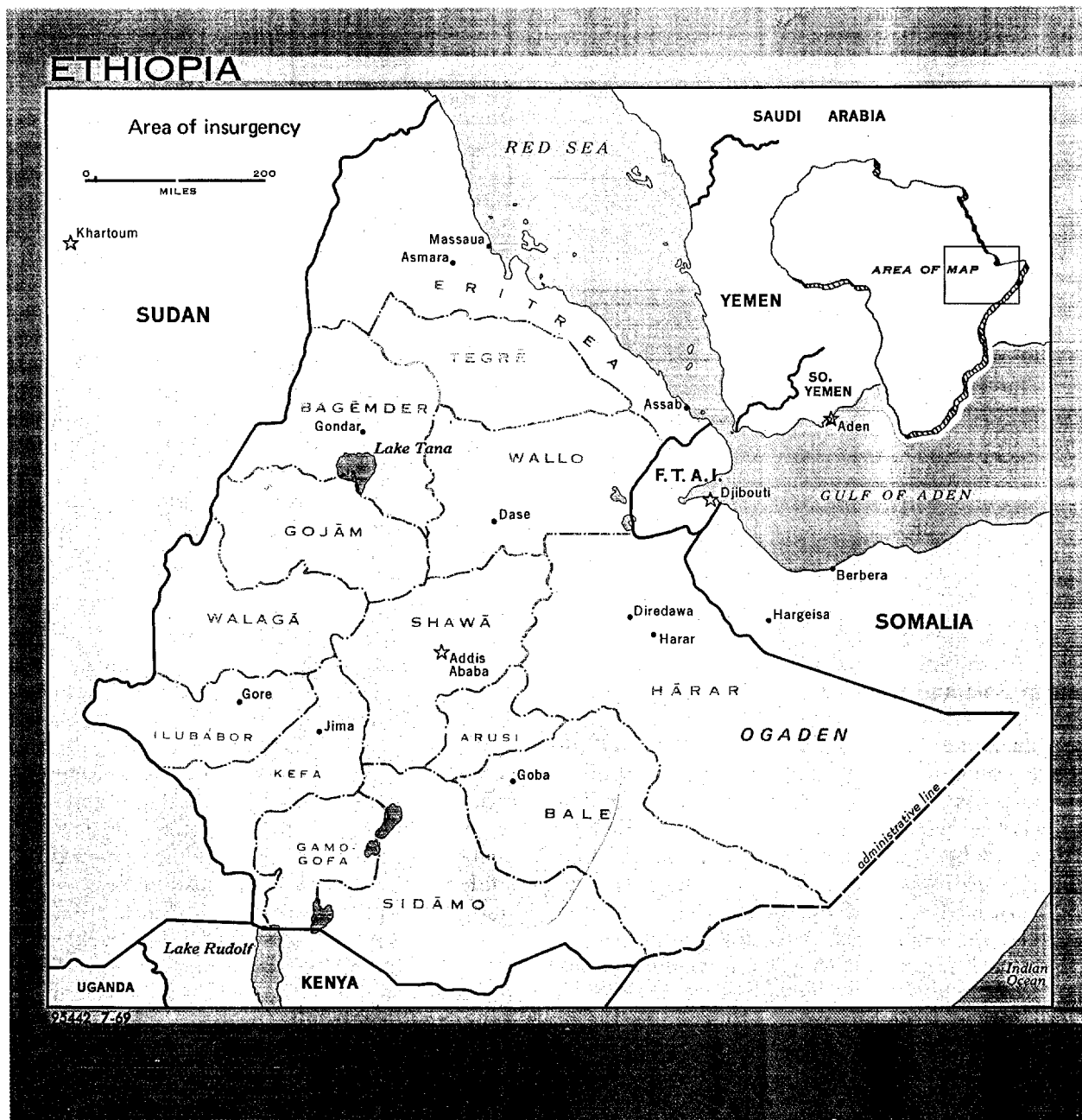
Control over the restive ethnic minorities and the insurgent groups in the empire is being maintained, but at an increasing cost to the government. Haile Selassie has always been willing to tolerate a certain amount of dissidence as a means of keeping the army occupied and away from the capital. The over-all level of insurgency is rising, however, and could jeopardize internal security if the authority of the central government weakens.

In Eritrea, the largely Muslim separatist Eritrean Liberation Front has embarked on a new campaign after a period of relative inactivity

**SECRET**

SECRET

25X1



SECRET

SECRET

25X1

dating back to mid 1967, when supplies from the Front's radical Arab donors dwindled following the Arab-Israeli war. Communist arms, including some Chinese small arms, have been filtering in from Arab middlemen through Aden, Yemen, and Sudan. Front trainees from Syria—and possibly from Communist China and Cuba—are back in the field. The Front, avoiding its past errors of trying to best the army in the open, is undertaking a more sophisticated campaign of selective sabotage against targets in Eritrea. In order to publicize its cause, it is attacking targets outside Ethiopia, and damage has been inflicted so far on Ethiopian Airlines jets in Frankfurt and Karachi as well as on Ethiopian property in neighboring Djibouti.

The Ethiopians are nervously watching the new radical Sudanese Government that gained power in May. Because Sudan has been the staging area for Front operations in Eritrea, Addis fears the new Khartoum regime will follow up on its public statements to aid liberation movements by more actively supporting the Front than did past Sudanese governments.

An active insurgency has also been sputtering along among dissident Arusi Galla tribesmen in Bale and parts of Sidamo provinces since 1966. Although little more than bandits, these guerrilla bands have continually harassed and inflicted casualties on regular and irregular units sent against them. The dissidents, supplied through the illegal arms trade in the Horn of Africa and by occasional donations from Somali sources who evade the Somali Government's restrictions, have stepped up the pressure since late last year. By themselves, the Arusi Gallas are not a significant threat but they are a costly irritant. The government seems unwilling or unable to divert forces from elsewhere to subdue them. Military operations are bogged down, hampered by poor logistical support, inept officer leader-

ship, and by the use of poorly trained and unreliable irregulars from the Territorial Army.

The Somali-inhabited Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, long an area of contention with the Somali Republic, has been relatively quiet since the border clashes of 1964. This peace rests on a fragile base, however. Mutual suspicions continue to trouble Somali-Ethiopian relations, and Somali Prime Minister Egal's successful efforts to achieve detente could easily be upset in the event of a change of government in Mogadiscio and an upswing in Somali irredentist ambitions. The Ogaden has been administered largely through the Ethiopian Army, whose strong-arm measures to collect taxes and pacify the Somali nomads have caused much of the friction between the two countries. The Ethiopians have taken some steps to return the area to civilian administration and to ease tensions, but the warlike nature of the nomads requires a large military presence, which in turn raises the possibility of further incidents with Somalia.

#### THE STUDENTS

Although Haile Selassie still manages to neutralize the military and the aristocracy by his maneuvers, none of his techniques has been successful with Ethiopia's restive students. Their discontent is currently the most visible sign of dissatisfaction with the regime. The gradual social reform Haile Selassie has encouraged over the years has not kept pace with the demands of the students, who see themselves alienated from what they consider a backward and authoritarian society. Student radicals are now actively seeking pretexts for violent confrontation with the government. In turn, the authorities have become hypersensitive to the protests for fear that the students might serve as a catalyst for dissident ethnic minorities and other malcontents.

SECRET



SECRET

25X1

The most serious student disorders, which for the first time had anti-US overtones, occurred in April 1968. Firm government intervention prevented demonstrations planned for last March, but subsequent student disruptions brought effective education in the capital to an early end for the school year. Anti-US sentiment was noticeably strong among the students again this year. Their discontent focused on the large US presence at the university, on the Peace Corps, and on US military and economic assistance to the government, which the students believe is keeping the Emperor in power.

The most significant recent development is the involvement of secondary students in the provinces. Practically all previous unrest had centered in the student unions and in the leftist student "Crocodile Society" in Addis. Under a government program begun in 1965, students from the university in Addis, who spend one year working in the provinces, have evidently implanted their ideas among the previously apolitical provincial students.

The government is faced today with the problem of isolating the students from other malcontents. The students have not won the sympathy of the general public, but there is a clear bond between them and discontented young bureaucrats, university faculty members, and some army officers. Using force against the students involves considerable risk because many students are from families in the establishment. The students seem willing to keep up their pressure, and they have ignored the Emperor's appeals for order.

## OUTLOOK

Each of these problems is likely to become more difficult for Haile Selassie during his remaining years. Although he is now in control of the government and security forces, unhappiness with his autocratic rule will likely continue to grow and could nurture serious and perhaps successful plotting.\* Further incidents, such as serious student demonstrations, could also precipitate a general breakdown in public order in the capital that the Emperor might not be able to contain. The continuing mood of unease and pessimism that prevails among ranking Ethiopians in Addis casts some doubt on the government's ability to respond to a major crisis. There is reason to believe that, should it fail to do so, the military might intervene and depose the Emperor if this alternative became a condition for restoring order.



Crown Prince Asfa Wossen

\*The government, in keeping with its usual censorship policy but also perhaps indicative of its nervousness, banned all sales of a recent issue of Time for its review of a new book by Edward Luttwak entitled, Coup d'Etat, A Practical Handbook.

SECRET

SECRET



25X1

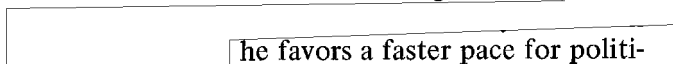
These problems have particularly serious implications for the future because they will be inherited by the Emperor's successor, who will not have Haile Selassie's prestige and authority to deal with them. The Emperor has designated his son, Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, to succeed to the throne, but successions have rarely been peaceful in Ethiopia. There are strong possibilities that real trouble will come after Haile Selassie's firm hand is removed. In the early stages of succession, it is likely that the Amhara establishment and the military leadership will rally around the Crown Prince in the interest of national unity and order. Beyond this, it is impossible to make predictions except that the military will certainly play a crucial role.

The Crown Prince is relatively unknown. He is 52 years old and has some medical problems.



25X1

He seems to be well informed on domestic and foreign affairs.



25X1

he favors a faster pace for political and social reforms, and he is interested in seeing Ethiopia become a true constitutional monarchy.

25X1

25X1

\* \* \*

SECRET

**Secret**

**Secret**