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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 July 1956

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 48-56

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR SIMONSON'S VIEWS ON ETHIOPIA*

1. Ambassador Joseph Simonson, who is returning to Addis Ababa following home leave, discussed his views on Ethiopia with interested Board and Staff members on 13 June. He referred those interested to his despatch of last spring giving impressions of the country after almost three years' service.

2. Danger of Communist Penetration. The Ambassador noted that the Soviet Legation had recently been raised to Embassy status and that for the first time two Soviet military attaches had been accredited to Addis Ababa. While these moves might not in themselves be significant, the Ambassador believed they were indicative of increased Soviet interest in Ethiopia. He also raised the question of whether the Yugoslavs may be fronting for the Bloc in Ethiopia, citing as evidence a) the fact that Yugoslavs operate the largest department stores in the capital, which sells primarily Czech and Yugoslav goods; b) the tone of their propaganda output; c) a Belgrade rumor reported through the American Embassy there that Tito would act as a Soviet "front man" during his visit to Ethiopia; d) Yugoslav aid offers to Ethiopia. The Ambassador stated, however, that none of the evidence was as yet conclusive.

3. Yugoslav-Ethiopian Relations. Mr. Simonson said the "love feast" between these two countries began to recede about the time of Tito's visit. There were several reasons for this: First, Tito stayed too long--ten days--in view of Ethiopia's limited facilities. In addition, the Emperor and the Marshal "got in each other's hair" as a result of being thrown together too much. Second, the Ethiopians grew

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rather weary of Yugoslav anti-Italian talk. About the time of the visit, substantive conversations between Ethiopia and Italy on a reparations agreement had about been completed and the Ethiopians wanted to get on with the settlement. Marshal Tito gave the Emperor two gifts. One, a very fine small yacht, is kept at Massawa. The other, a monument in the capital, had caused some problems. Styled after the Washington Monument, it was generally in good taste, except for a series of bronze reliefs around the base depicting scenes from Ethiopian history in which great prominence is given to the various Italian massacres. Following an Italian protest, the government decided to deemphasize the monument. It was not mentioned, much less dedicated, during Tito's visit and the Ambassador thought the bronzes might eventually be removed.

4. Long-Range Dangers. Ambassador Simonson believed the real possibility of long range Communist penetration lies in the number of dissatisfied students coming home from abroad. There are several hundred in the US now and others elsewhere. The government's capacity for absorption of this educated group has about been reached. If they cannot find useful employment they will probably become subject to Communist propaganda. This is not to say that there is much prospect of a mass revolution. Revolutionary activities are not in the Ethiopian character and the people generally have adequate land and food supplies. However, a factor of discontent will be present. The answer seems to lie, the Ambassador said, in developing industries related to agriculture, such as improvement in the growing, grading and marketing of Ethiopian coffee. So far there are few indications that the country has mineral resources. While heavy industry does not seem appropriate, the new educated class could be absorbed in developments connected with existing resources and in business, a field the Ethiopians have generally ignored.

5. Governmental Affairs. Ambassador Simonson noted that the Crown Prince was being brought more and more into prominence and that there seemed little doubt that he would succeed his father on the throne. There is a possibility that the Crown Prince, whose grasp of affairs of state has improved considerably, may visit the US next year. He noted there had been some improvement in government administration. The three brothers occupying the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance and the Vice Minister of Education were cited as particularly able. (In theory the Emperor serves as his own Minister of Education; in practice the Vice Minister runs the show.) On the other hand, others, such as the Minister of Posts, Telephones and Telegraph was incompetent. The Ministry of Interior also had some difficulties in exerting government authority in areas remote from the capital.

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6. Muslim Minority. In answer to a question, Ambassador Simonson noted that the Muslim minority in Ethiopia proper is very large, being just under 50 percent, and would be a majority if Eritrea were included. This fact has a political bearing on Ethiopia's relations with Egypt, the Sudan and will affect the development of the Somali question.

7. Relations with the West. The Ethiopians have been influenced by the belief that the neutralist nations, such as Egypt, seem to have profited more than firm friends of the West. The Ambassador said this question was brought up frequently in the Embassy's official dealings. The Ethiopians were hurt at not being informed in advance of the announcement of US-UK-IBRD to aid Egypt in the construction of the Aswan High Dam. (He indicated knowledge that such plans were now in abeyance.) At the same time, the Ethiopians have no present plans for developing the waters of the Blue Nile. Sites for hydroelectric stations are quite remote and the area through which the river flows in Ethiopia is not suitable for agriculture.

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