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SAS/Notes

Tuesday, December 08, 1998

Note for the Record

Telephone conversation with Anthony Lake, former National
Security Advisor of President Clinton

During my meeting with Anthony Lake last Friday, December 4, 1998, (a meeting which was held at his request and in my office to exchange views on the status of his mission aimed at getting a breakthrough on the Ethiopian Eritrean Conflict and a meeting which lasted from 1720 to 1850 hours), the former National Security Advisor told me that he would be calling me while I am in South Africa to update me on the status of his consultations with both Prime Minister Meles and President Isaias. We agreed that he could do so Tuesday, December 08 when I am in Pretoria after my visit to Cape Town. He had also suggested that in order to be able to talk to me on a confidential basis, I may have to go to the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria so that we can talk over a secure line. I agreed to this arrangement.

Thus at 1830 hours this evening, I was at the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria when I met briefly with the U.S. Ambassador as well as with the Deputy Head of Mission having been escorted into the Embassy by Alan.....

At 1840 hours Anthony Lake called. He was in Asmara having just left in the afternoon from Addis Ababa after having another session with Prime Minister Meles.

During the telephone conversation which lasted 15 minutes (i.e. from 1840 to 1855 hours), the former National Security Advisor informed me the following :

His meeting with Prime Minister Meles went fairly well. The Prime Minister did not agree with the Proposals concerning the militia. He also wanted "a few little changes". But otherwise the proposals were acceptable.

His discussions with President Isaias and his collaborators hit a snag. The essence of the problem is that the Eritreans want a pull back of their forces as part of the demilitarisation. Within this context they are prepared that the withdrawal could start from Badme. They are opposed to the reinstatement of Ethiopian Administration despite the fact that according to the latest U.S. proposal the activities of the Administration will be effectively monitored by the presence of International Observers and the role of the militia will be very much circumscribed. The Eritreans take the view that to agree to redeployment and the reinstatement of the Ethiopian administration would be tantamount to accepting that they are wrong.

The Eritrean leadership maintained that if there is an insistence on the return to the status quo ante then that status quo should go back to the situation of July/August 1997.

Lake explained that such a position is not in conformity with the position of the OAU, the UN or the United States.

With this inflexible position of the Eritreans in mind, he, Lake went back to Addis Ababa today. He met with Prime Minister Meles again. The meeting was very friendly. The Prime Minister, having been apprised of the Eritrean position, did not say that it was the end of the process. Clearly however, time is running out. Lake told me that he has a sense that increasingly the Prime Minister is being pushed by the hardliners. The Prime Minister is disposed to find an agreement but he will not be prepared to compromise on what he considers as the fundamentals.

Anthony Lake emphasized that time was running out. He was now in Asmara and has been talking to the "two Yamanis". They both think that Ethiopia will not do anything. He told the Eritreans that if they can find a compromise, "we (i.e. the U.S.) will do everything possible to make it not to appear as a defeat for Eritrea". The Eritreans reiterated their position that they are prepared to redeploy as part of the demilitarisation. They will not accept the return of the Ethiopian administration.

In conclusion, Anthony Lake informed me that he is going back to Washington tomorrow. He would continue to stay engaged. He will be in contact with the UN. It is important, he emphasized, that we should all stay engaged. He argued strongly against any back off now as to do so would have ominous implications.

The telephone conversation ended with both of us agreeing to stay in touch.
