



# Guerillas in Ethiopia

***"We are fighting against the Ethiopian Empire, but we know that the Ethiopian Empire is part of a much bigger empire, the American Empire, and that like the Vietnamese, we may have to fight against them as well."***

Men and boys over the age of eight or nine are being herded into detention camps to prevent their potential support for guerrilla troops. Thousands of people are fleeing their homeland to a neighboring country. A state of emergency has been declared by the reactionary government. The guerrillas have made a plea to present their case before the U.N.

All this is taking place not in southeast Asia or Latin America but in East Africa. It is happening in Eritrea, a little-known "province" of Ethiopia, a strip of land along the Red Sea where guerrilla war has been going on for eight years. The guerrillas are members of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), a movement to free Eritrea from Ethiopian domination.

Eritrea was colonized by the Italians from 1890 to 1941, when it was "liberated" by the allies and given to Great Britain to administer. In 1952, Eritrea was placed in a federal relationship with Ethiopia under U.N. approval. Finally, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea outright as a province without the consultation or consent of the Eritrean people.

The Eritrean people, who consider themselves separate from the Ethiopian people in religion and culture, did not want to become a part of the Ethiopian empire. After repeated attempts to fight their battle at the U.N., a group of Eritreans joined together in the ELF to resist domination through armed struggle. Since 1962 guerrilla warfare has been waged in Eritrea. Today the ELF claims a force of 10,000 equipped and trained Eritreans that it can rely on.

On November 21, 1970, the Commander of Ethiopia's Second Army was killed by ELF guerrillas in an ambush. It was this incident which triggered the current state of emergency. The Second Army of the Ethiopian Empire is now on a rampage of burning, shooting, preventive detention, and bombing. People are being driven from their homes and are fleeing by the thousands to neighboring Sudan.

Eritrea is Ethiopia's only access to the Red Sea; without it, Ethiopia would be landlocked. But its importance for Ethiopia is more than just geographical. The U.S. has a large military communications base there, and this base has tremendous strategic value for the U.S. in the Middle East and Africa.

The Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, uses Eritrea as a pawn. He lets the U.S. have free access to the Red Sea in exchange for full support, aid, and protection for his repressive regime. He is a dictator who maintains Ethiopia in a feudal state with generous help from the U.S. government.

This dialogue and those to follow are excerpted from the June 1, 1970 hearings of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations:

Senator Symington: Ethiopia's average annual income you say is a very low figure, \$64, that is a very low per capita annual income, right?

Mr. Newsom (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs): That is; it is one of the lowest in Africa, yes.

Senator Symington: What did the Emperor do with the near quarter of a billion dollars in economic assistance we gave him?

The aid provided by the U.S. Government, both military and economic goes toward sustaining the regime rather than the people of Ethiopia. Since 1953, the U.S. has given \$159 million in military assistance to Ethiopia. This amounts to nearly half the total U.S. military aid to all African countries — since that time. For 1970, military

assistance to Ethiopia was \$12 million — almost two-thirds of the total for all Africa. Nearly one-half the Africans trained in the U.S. under the military assistance program are Ethiopian. This military aid is not, as the U.S. government has sometimes claimed, for use in fighting border disputes. Rather it is for internal disputes.

Sen. Fulbright: What is your policy about a threatened internal insurrection of any kind?

Mr. Newsom: Well, we have established it as a policy, and it is a policy, that I think we would try to do our very best to maintain, to not interfere in the internal affairs of Ethiopia.

The American Consul-General in Eritrea is a counter-insurgency expert whose last job was in Vietnam.

Sen. Fulbright: You said that we supplied the bombs, and they are using their aircraft against the insurgents, aren't they?

Mr. Bader (Department of Defense): They used their aircraft in Asmara and, as you say, against insurgents. I am not entirely sure how I would define "against the insurgents." If you mean that they are shooting at the insurgents from the aircraft —

Sen. Fulbright: I assume they dropped a bomb; isn't that the way they use a bomb?

Mr. Bader: They very well may, Senator. We do not keep track —

Sen. Fulbright: How does this correspond with your former statements that we would not be interested in supporting the government against the insurgency?

Mr. Bader: I did not say that.

Mr. Bader: (later): But there is nothing wrong, Senator, with their using that ammunition for that purpose. After all, our program is authorized for and keyed to their internal security problems.



There are 1800 American military advisors in Ethiopia (mainly in Eritrea) to train the 40,000 man Ethiopian Army. There is a 100 man military mission in the capital, Addis Ababa, which works directly with a team of Israeli military personnel. The Israeli team is responsible for training the Ethiopian commando police force which fights the guerrillas. It is reported that two-thirds of the Ethiopian Army is used in Eritrea.

In addition to providing training and equipment for the imperial army, the U.S. has loaned a ship and provided training for officers and crew of the Ethiopian Navy. It has aided in the design and training of the Imperial Police Force.

U.S. aid also supports the Haile Selassie University; over 25 per cent of the faculty are American nationals, paid by American sources. There is a major Peace Corps

program in Ethiopia, which at one time supplied 60 per cent of all secondary school teachers in Ethiopia.

There is also a U.S. mapping division, which, in the process of flying mapping missions over Eritrea, makes regular reports about guerrilla groupings spotted from the air. Eritrea must be the best-mapped area in East Africa.

In addition to this overt assistance, the U.S. buys 70 per cent of Ethiopia's coffee — significant because Ethiopia is a one-crop economy.

The U.S. supports Ethiopia because of its importance in Africa and the Middle East. The military base in Eritrea (Called Kagnev) is the most obvious benefit that the U.S. gets from its deal with the Emperor. It is a primary relay station for the worldwide defense communications system. It serves as a satellite earth terminal and it provides a link in the diplomatic telecommunications system. In addition, it is a navy communications station and an air force base. It is strategically located in relation to Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

The importance of Eritrea for the U.S. goes beyond the presence of the base. Eritrea is constantly depicted as a potential member of the "Arab camp." If it were independent, the Red Sea would be totally controlled by Arabs. As it is, Ethiopia is the only country in the area in which the U.S. has overflight, landing and port rights. It is an enclave which the U.S. does not want to lose in the Middle East struggle.

The activities of the ELF have been concealed and dismissed by the U.S. out of fear that its extensive involvement would be uncovered. For example, the U.S. Consul-General in Eritrea was kidnapped by the ELF in 1969 and there was no U.S. acknowledgment concerning the incident.

Soon after, ELF guerrillas hijacked an Ethiopian Airliner. U.S. government spokesman and Ethiopian officials greeted the accompanying publicity about the ELF by dismissing the guerrillas as "shiftas" or roving bandits.

The most recent "state of emergency" explanation by U.S. officials contends that there is restlessness caused by "a succession of foreign rulers."

The ELF is now asking for U.N. hearings to make known to the world the reality of this "succession of foreign rulers" and the part the U.S. plays in it.

Sen. Fulbright: I don't think the public has the slightest idea of how our money is being dissipated around the world. They would have revolted long ago, as this committee would have. Senator Symington's inquiry — and this is the first time we have had one — not just about Ethiopia but in many places — has indicated that there has been a very artful, in-depth concealment of what we are doing.

In the words of an ELF commando speaking with Liberation News Service reporters:

"We are fighting against the Ethiopian Empire, but we know that the Ethiopian Empire is part of a much bigger empire, the American Empire, and that like the Vietnamese, we may have to fight against them as well."

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