

MEMORANDUM

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

26 November 1975

SECRET(GDS)

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

BRENT SCOWCROFT *BS*

SUBJECT:

Communications with the Middle East

The memorandum at Tab A was given to you by a private citizen who is concerned that our communications capabilities to the Middle East are shaky. You asked for a report on the matter.

U. S. communications in the Mid-East have been substantially degraded by two recent incidents: (1) the failure of the Atlantic Defense Satellite Communications System (DSCS) satellite, and (2) extensive damage to the U. S. Naval Communications Station at Asmara, Ethiopia, caused by the September 1975 attack by Eritrean insurgents.

A replacement satellite to restore DSCS service to the Mid-East is planned for launch in May 1977. In the interim, satellite communications capabilities are being provided in most Mid-East areas by leased commercial circuits over the INTELSAT satellite, as well as use of the United Kingdom's SKYNET satellite, and will be augmented by the Gap-filler Satellite early next year.

Until the time of the insurgent attack, the Asmara communications station provided long-range high-frequency radio communications for U. S. Naval units operating in the northwest Indian Ocean, contingency communications for U. S. military operations in the Middle East, or Persian Gulf areas (disaster relief or airlift, for example), and communications to Presidential or VIP aircraft (MYSTIC STAR). Partial restoration of operations at Asmara is expected in March 1976. In the interim, limited high frequency radio communications with reduced coverage is provided by other U. S. military installations in Europe, and from the U. S. communications sites at Bahrein and Diego Garcia.

OSD Review Completed

The long-term future need for the communications station at Asmara is being addressed by an interagency study group directed by NSSM 233. A number of alternatives for the station and the functions it performs are

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

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Until the time of the insurgent attack, the Asmara communications station used a combination of high frequency (HF) radio, UHF ground-to-air, and DSCS II links back to the CONUS to provide communications support for three major functions: (1) U. S. Naval tactical fleet communications to and from units operating in the northwest Indian Ocean; (2) contingency communications for any U. S. military operation (disaster relief, airlift, etc.) or Task Force deployed to the Africa, Middle East, or Persian Gulf area; and (3) Presidential and VIP aircraft communications (MYSTIC STAR). Partial restoration of operations at Asmara is expected in March 1976. In the interim, limited HF capability with reduced coverage and reliability is provided by U. S. Navy sites in Greece, Bahrein (Persian Gulf coverage only), and Diego Garcia; by U. S. Air Force facilities in England, Turkey, and Ascension Island; and U. S. Army facilities in Germany.

The long-term future of and need for the communications station at Asmara is being addressed by an Interagency Study directed by NSSM 233. This study group is considering the value of the Asmara station to the U. S. and is evaluating a number of alternatives for the base and the functions it performs, including:

- (1) Retention of the current base;
- (2) Relocation to another site in Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or other locations in the Middle East or Africa;
- (3) Closure of the current base and support of selected missions by deployment of mobile/transportable communications facilities when required;
- (4) Closure of the current base and support of selected missions by a ship specifically configured as a communications station. (This alternative, which was specifically suggested by the memorandum to the President, at Tab A, would be less vulnerable to political pressure or insurgent activists, but has several drawbacks including the high operating and maintenance cost of the ship, and technical limitations on the capability of the HF radio imposed by the limited area available for HF antennas.)

A complete answer to the questions raised by the memorandum at Tab A, including an assessment of the severity of the problem, and an evaluation of alternative solutions, will be included in the response to NSSM 233. This response is currently being circulated in draft to State, Defense, and CIA for clearance and/or comment.

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A proposed memorandum to the President is at Tab I for your signature. This memorandum summarizes the status of U.S. communication to the Middle East and informs the President of the actions being taken in response to NSSM 233.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum to the President at Tab I.

Concurrence:

Hal Horan *HJH*

Attachments:

Tab I -- Memo to the President (for signature)

Tab A -- Memo to President from private citizen

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

INFORMATIONSECRET(GDS)

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FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT
SUBJECT: Communications with the Middle East

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being evaluated by this study, including alternate locations for a land-based station as well as use of a ship converted into a floating communications station. The response to this NSSM will provide a comprehensive answer to the questions raised by the memorandum at Tab A.

Attachment:

Tab A -- Memo from a private citizen

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done by backup
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**THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON**

November 14, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM: DICK CHENEY *D*

Brent, the attached was given to the President by a private citizen who claims to have some knowledge that our communications capabilities in the Middle East are shakey.

The President asked that I pass it on to you with the request that you check into it and get back to him with a report.

Attachment

MEMORANDUM TO PRESIDENT FORD

In view of the volatile situation in almost every country of the Middle East, there is concern about the communications system there for the United States. Turkey is directly connected with the NATO system, but the communication system for the United States to other countries in the Middle East is not always reliable. Obviously we cannot rely on Beirut, and, though we have communications into and out of Israel, that system is not connected with the rest of the Middle East.

So much can happen so fast in that part of the world that we need the most reliable and best possible communications at all times. And systems that are completely controlled by us. One solution (suggested by U.S. personnel): anchoring a ship in the Eastern Mediterranean with all systems of communication on it, not just relying on satellites; then connect it with all of our installations in all of the countries beyond Turkey as far as Iran, down through the Persian Gulf, and throughout the Middle East.

To sum up, it may be farsighted to find out if indeed this problem exists, and, if so, what the solution should be.

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