

IN ETHIOPIA, MENGISTU'S FINAL SOLUTION

A catastrophic famine once again threatens Ethiopia. Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam's early April decision to expel all foreign relief workers from the drought-stricken northern provinces of Tigre and Eritrea places three million Ethiopians beyond the reach of any famine relief programs. Without immediate famine assistance, they will die within weeks. Mengistu's action is widely seen by Western diplomats and relief officials as proof that he now will attempt to settle Ethiopia's civil war in these two provinces by using famine as his ultimate weapon. As one U.S. official puts it, "It looks like the Ethiopians have decided to solve the Eritrean problem by eliminating the Eritreans." If so, it would be Mengistu's Final Solution.

Push Moscow, the U.N., and Africans. For several years, the world has watched as the communist Mengistu regime has used food as a weapon in its civil war. Mengistu's latest outrage at last should force civilized nations to take the drastic action necessary to prevent the deaths of those three million Ethiopians. As Ethiopia's largest aid donor, the U.S. should take the lead in coordinating effective international action. The Reagan Administration should: push Moscow to bring to heel its Ethiopian client regime; call for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to condemn Ethiopia and design a mechanism for rushing food into Eritrea and Tigre; and mobilize America's African friends to press for action in the Organization of African Unity. Washington also should consider direct military action to bring in emergency famine assistance from neighboring Sudan, and to overthrow the Mengistu regime and replace it with one that cares for the Ethiopian people.

The disaster that struck Ethiopia in 1984-1985 — which killed one million people — was man-made, a direct result of the policies pursued by the Mengistu regime in its war against insurgents in the northern provinces. Forced resettlement, originally designed to move 1.5 million peasants from their homes in the north to unsettled lands in the south, actually transported 600,000 before Western pressure succeeded in forcing Mengistu to halt the program. In the meantime, however, 100,000 had died on the way. "Villagization" was Mengistu's policy of forcing peasants off their lands and onto huge collective farms, akin to Stalin's early-1930s policy of collectivization in the Ukraine, and with strikingly similar results: unproductive farms, no food, and starving people. Together, Mengistu's twin policies are blamed for 750,000 of the one million dead in the last famine. Following that experience, Western governments and relief agencies pressed Mengistu to change his policies.

Brutality Without Witnesses. Though Mengistu in fact did halt the forced resettlement program temporarily, he reinstated it last November. Then, early this March, Ethiopian troops shot and killed 20 peasants who refused to be resettled. Two weeks later, Eritrean rebels announced their greatest victory of the war, claiming to have killed or captured 18,000 govern-

ment troops. On March 31, speaking to the central committee of the ruling communist party, Mengistu admitted the threat posed to his regime by the rebels. It was the first time that he had ever acknowledged the strength of the insurgents fighting his forces. One week later he forced all foreign relief workers to leave the provinces of Eritrea and Tigre. In doing so he placed up to three million Ethiopians beyond the reach of any relief programs. Relief officials believe the reason for their forced removal was to prevent any foreign witnesses from testifying to the brutality of the actions sure to be taken by Mengistu's forces in the two provinces.

There is no time left for subtle diplomatic persuasion; action is necessary. As Ethiopia's largest aid donor, the U.S. should:

◆◆ **Pressure Moscow.** Since 1977, the Kremlin has given Mengistu \$3.5 billion in arms and other military assistance and 2,000 Soviet military advisers. Cuba has sent 10,000 combat troops. Moscow has more influence over Mengistu than any other government. Ronald Reagan, at this month's Moscow summit, should press Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to prove that he is the reformist that he claims by pressuring Mengistu to open up Eritrea and Tigre to foreign relief workers, and to abandon his policies of forced resettlement and vilagization.

◆◆ **Call an emergency U.N. meeting.** Washington should request an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the causes of the crisis in Ethiopia and possible remedies. The Security Council could threaten Mengistu with mandatory and comprehensive sanctions if he refuses to allow foreign relief workers back into Eritrea and Tigre.

◆◆ **Press for an OAU meeting.** The Organization of African Unity is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. Washington should ask such African friends as the Sudan, Kenya, and Zaire to press for an OAU meeting to discuss joint African action to relieve the suffering of the Ethiopian people.

◆◆ **Plan military action.** If these measures do not prevent the loss of innocent lives in Ethiopia, the Reagan Administration should consider direct military action to ensure that famine relief gets through to Eritrea and Tigre. An aid pipeline could be set up through neighboring Sudan, with armed escorts to ensure the safe passage of the food.

Further, the U.S. should press other civilized nations to consider whether or not Mengistu Haile Mariam and his regime should remain as the government of Ethiopia. Mengistu has demonstrated repeatedly that he is one of the world's most brutal leaders. The holocaust that he is conducting in Ethiopia is clear testament to that fact. The world approved when the Tanzanian government in 1979 decided enough was enough and sent its forces into neighboring Uganda to overthrow Idi Amin. Even ultra-liberal George McGovern called for military action to overthrow the bloodthirsty Pol Pot regime and bring an end to the killing fields of Cambodia. And now it is generally recognized that the U.S. should have taken direct military action early in World War II to liberate Hitler's death camps before he killed the millions of their inmates. Mengistu is threatening a Final Solution that will lead to a holocaust on the same scale.

William Pascoe
Policy Analyst

For further information:

Rony Brauman, "Famine Aid: Were We Duped?" *Reader's Digest*, October 1986.

William Pascoe, "Time for Action Against Mengistu's Ethiopia," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 568, March 11, 1987.