

February 23, 1977
**Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet
Ambassador to Somalia G.V. Samsonov and Somali
President Siad Barre**

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Summary:

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Somalia G.V. Samsonov and Somali President Siad Barre regarding the Somali request for Soviet aid and the situation between Somalia and Ethiopia

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EMBASSY OF THE USSR IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA

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NOTES FROM CONVERSATION

with President of the Democratic Republic of Somalia

MOHAMMED SIAD BARRE

23 February 1977

Today I was received by President Siad.

In accordance with my orders I informed him about the considerations of the Soviet leaders, and Comrade Brezhnev personally, concerning the situation developing around Ethiopia.

The President thanked me for the information. Then he pointed out that certain people in the SDR, encouraged from abroad, speculated that Soviet cooperation with Ethiopia was allegedly carried out to the detriment of Soviet-Somali relations. According to Siad, he had to condemn such a point of view in his speech at the Khalan Military School in particular, he had to say that such statements should be considered anti-Somali propaganda aimed at subversion of the Somali revolution. The President emphasized that the assistance that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries provide for the Ethiopian revolution was not only justified, but also necessary. The Soviet Union, as we understand it, the President said, is trying to help Ethiopia stabilize on the road of socialist orientation, and those goals of the Soviet Union completely coincide with Somali interests. The SDR has an interest in having a socialist, not a capitalist, neighbor.

Characterizing Chairman of the PMAC H.M. Mengistu, President Siad called him a firm and consistent proponent of the progressive change in Ethiopia. However, according to Siad, Mengistu does not abide by Leninist principles in the nationality issue. He must give the nations living in Ogaden, including both the Eritreans and the Somalis, the right to self-determination. According to the President, it is important that Mengistu resolves the territorial problem right now, or at least gives assurances that he is ready to consider this question positively in the future. Siad alleged that the struggle for power in the Ethiopian leadership was still going on, and that there were no positive changes in the state apparatus of that country. The President thinks that Mengistu is unwilling to meet with him. He mentioned the fact that the Chairman of the PMAC did not give an immediate response to the [Tanzania President Julius] Nyerere letter, which was delivered to Addis Ababa by Vice President [Aboud] Jumbe of Tanzania, and in which, according to Siad, the idea of his meeting with Mengistu was put forth.

Responding to the Soviet remarks concerning statements of certain Somali statesmen in Sudan, President Siad alleged that member of the Politburo CC SRSP Suleiman had only expressed an opinion on the situation in Ethiopia, and that Minister of Public Health Rabile God was just giving his personal views, and that his statement was, allegedly, provoked by the Sudanese. The main threat to Ethiopia was arising from Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya, not from the SDR, emphasized the President. According to a reliable source, Siad said, the internal reaction, represented by the Ethiopian Democratic Union headquartered in London and supported by the CIA, was carefully preparing a broad terrorist campaign against the leadership of the PMAC and against other progressive Ethiopian leaders. Siad denied the information that special units trained in the Somali territory, which also included Somali servicemen, were being transferred to the Ogaden. The SDR was not going to start a war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden, stressed the President. Such a conflict would be detrimental to both countries. Only imperialists and the Arab reactionaries would win

in such a case. We understand this very well, said Siad. However, we will support the struggle for unification with the Fatherland of the Somalis living in the Ogaden, emphasized the President. He said that the people living in the Ogaden were their brothers and sisters, and that his leadership could not reject them if they appeal to them for help. The people of Somalia would not understand its leaders if they were to suppress their struggle for liberation from the Ethiopian colonial yoke.

I explained to Siad the CPSU policy on the nationality issue.

Responding to my question concerning Somali-American contacts, the President told me about his meeting with USA representative at the UN [Andrew] Young in Zanzibar in early February 1977. He mentioned that the meeting was held at the American initiative. According to Siad, Young informed him about the "new approach" of the Carter Administration in their policy toward Africa, and stressed the USA readiness to cooperate with all African countries. Siad Barre said to Young that the peoples of Africa will judge the "new" American policy by the practical actions of the American administration. First of all, the United States must withdraw its support for the white minority regimes in South Africa. Responding to Young's question, why the SDR was always acting from an anti-American position, Siad said that it was the United States that was always conducting a vicious anti-Somali policy. The SDR decisively condemned the USA position on the Middle East, and also the support that the USA gave to various reactionary forces in their struggle against progressive regimes, and the fomenting of military conflicts in various regions of the globe.

The President told me that recently a representative of the USA State Department visited Mogadishu, arriving from Khartoum. He had a meeting with General Director Abdurrahman Jama Barre of the MFA of the SDR. The American requested to have meetings with several Somali state leaders of his choice, including First Vice President Samantar. His request was denied. According to the President, the American left the SDR dissatisfied.

Touching upon his initiative for cooperation between the USSR and the SDR, the President repeated the suggestion he made earlier (17 January 1977) that the Soviet Union take on the development of the lands of the Fanole project. According to the President, Somalia had neither the necessary experts, nor technology, nor resources, and that it would be incorrect to invite other countries to carry out those tasks. Siad said that the provision about development of those lands had not been included in the original agreement on Fanole project construction only because of the incompetence of the Somali representatives who signed that document.

The President also reminded me of his request concerning construction of a naval base in the region of Mogadishu, and also of docks in Berbera and Kismayu, which was stated in the memorandum delivered to Moscow by First Vice President Samantar. Those projects are still in force and the Somali leadership is expecting the Soviet government to examine them favorably.

Speaking about the military airfield in Berbera which had been opened recently, Siad said that it had been built without taking into account the prospects of its possible civilian utilization. This airfield should serve not only the interests of the USSR, but the interests of the SDR also. In order for this airfield to be used by civil aviation in the future, it would be necessary additionally to build a control tower for air traffic controllers, a room for transit passengers, other necessary services of a modern airport, and also a hotel for 200-300 rooms in the city, in which the Soviet air crews and naval crews could also stay. Those additional constructions would serve as a kind of cover for the military airfield.

Having given a high evaluation of the Soviet assistance in the organization of fishing cooperatives, President Siad made a request that the Soviet side provide resources in the form of commodity credits to cover the local expenses in those cooperatives, since the SDR was experiencing shortages not only of material, but also of financial resources for those projects. Specifically, the Somali leadership was asking the Soviet Union to take responsibility for providing the minimum living standard for the families of transfer workers in the cooperatives, and to apportion up to 10 shillings per worker per day, mentioned the President. According to the President, he gave directives to certain Somali organizations to prepare official requests on the questions just mentioned.

President Siad expressed his warm gratitude to the CC CPSU for the decision to provide assistance in construction of the party school at the Central Committee of the SRSP. He said he considered that assistance a show of fraternal care from the CPSU for the SRSP which was undergoing a difficult formative period. He also thanked Moscow for the attention to the request for more Somali citizens, especially for people from Djibouti, to be given an opportunity to study in the Soviet Union, and for the decision to satisfy the request in the 1977-78 academic year.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR
IN THE SDR /G. SAMSONOV/

[Source: TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1621, ll. 10-14; translation by S. Savranskaya.]