

July 29, 1977

**Memorandum of conversation between Soviet
Ambassador to Ethiopia A.P. Ratanov and Mengistu**

Citation:

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Summary:

Memorandum of conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia A.P. Ratanov and Mengistu regarding Soviet support for Ethiopia and the consequent strain in Soviet-Somali relations

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

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TOP SECRET, Copy No. 2
From diary of 9 August 1977

A. P. RATANOV Ser. No. 276
NOTES OF CONVERSATION
with Chairman of PMAC of Ethiopia
HAILE MARIAMOM MENGISTU
29 July 1977

We received a visit from Mengistu and transmitted to him a message from Comrade L. I. Brezhnev in response to a communication from Mengistu, which was presented to Comrade Brezhnev for Comrade A. P. Kirilenko by the General Secretary of the PMAC, Fikre Selassie Wogderes.

Mengistu asked that we convey to Comrade Brezhnev his deep appreciation for the fraternal and candid message. We agreed, and conveyed to Mengistu the advice contained in the communication.

Mengistu placed great value on the fact that the Soviet Union is rendering support to Ethiopia, notwithstanding that this is leading to definite complications in Soviet-Somali relations. We understand, said Mengistu in this connection, that the Soviet Union is confronted with a complex dilemma: rendering military assistance to Ethiopia, it risks a loss of its opportunity in Somalia (e.g., Berbera). We are considering these questions, said Mengistu, and consider ourselves accountable to the revolutionary debt inhering in the obligation to take into account the interests of the Soviet Union in this region. Together with this, he observed, we hope that the victory of the Ethiopian anti-imperialist revolution will contribute to the common revolutionary cause.

In response to the representations of the Soviet Ambassador (the conference with Mengistu was one on one) that it is necessary to struggle not against Somalia, but in support of Somalia, Mengistu said that he agreed with this. So far, for example, the PMAC has not rendered support to the forces in Somalia which are operating against Siad Barre and seeking assistance in Ethiopia. We are not organizing, said Mengistu, partisan movements in Somalia, although specific opportunities for that have presented themselves and continue to do so. At the same time, representations of Eritrean organizations have been established in Mogadishu, along with a people's revolutionary party, the Ethiopian Democratic Union, and Fronts for the Liberation of Tigray and Oromia, not to mention the headquarters of the "Revolutionary Front of Western Somalia."

In response to the representations of the Soviet Ambassador, following on the directives of communications from Comrade L. I. Brezhnev, concerning the need for preservation of a dialogue with Somalia, Mengistu proclaimed that he was in agreement with the concepts and representations of Comrade L. I. Brezhnev. We accepted, he continued, the suggestions of the Soviet Union regarding the organization of a Somali-Ethiopian meeting in Moscow, when Somalia cut short its subversive activity in the Ogadan, and [we] are agreeable to continuing those discussions now, even as Somalia has stationed a portion of its regular troops on the territory of Ethiopia. Together with this, the PMAC will not grant territorial concessions to Somalia, although this is because in such a case the present Ethiopian government will fall. Already at this time, Mengistu noted in this connection, there is talk among the people, and even in right-wing circles, to the effect that the PMAC is not up to the task of defending either Ethiopia or the Ogadan, and that it should therefore be

deposed. Berhanu Bayeh, Mengistu continued, has been summoned to Addis Ababa for consultation, and afterward he will return to Moscow without delay, inasmuch as the PMAC has engaged and continues to engage in friendly negotiations with the Somalis over questions relating to the establishment of multi-faceted Ethiopian-Somali cooperation. Mengistu promised to consider the form (for example, his interview with the Ethiopian news agency) for additional presentations of the PMAC program for peaceful resolution of Ethiopian-Somali disagreements, as well as the Eritrean problem.

The Soviet Ambassador directed Mengistu's attention to the anti-socialist and even anti-Soviet (Maoist) propaganda which is being disseminating by certain private publishing houses.

Mengistu declared that implementation of the program of propaganda of Marxist-Leninist ideas has indeed been unsatisfactory. For this reason, the PMAC has reorganized the Provisional Bureau of Mass Organization Affairs [POMOA] and replaced its leadership.

Concerning the Chinese, Mengistu noted that they are not only disseminating literature, but are rendering direct support to Eritrean separatists and extremists.

In the course of the discussion, a number of questions were touched upon in connection with the structure of the Ethiopian armed forces.

In conclusion, Mengistu stated as follows: "We are attentive to the advice of our Soviet comrades in connection with the search for political solutions to both domestic and foreign problems. We will continue to strive for this in the future, and have already been required to execute many persons or place them in prison. At the present time I, for example, am restraining those who are proposing repressive measures, including those against errant organizations who proclaim their adherence to Marxism-Leninism but who are struggling against the PMAC. The main goal at the present time is to create a political party and a new worker-peasant army, inasmuch as the old army has displayed its weakness, and it turns out that in military terms the counter-revolution is stronger than the PMAC had supposed."

For his part, the Soviet Ambassador again laid emphasis on the need to preserve, no matter what, contacts with the leadership of the SDR.

The Soviet Ambassador additionally directed Mengistu's attention to the fact that the representations in his letter to Comrade Brezhnev concerning the supposed inadequacies of military supplies did not correspond to reality.

Mengistu responded to that by stating that, evidently, the translation of those remarks was inexact, inasmuch as he had in mind not the inadequacy of supplies of one or another sort of weapon, but rather a request to augment them with supplies of a different technical sort, in particular, that the supply of tanks be augmented with supplies of trailers for their transport from port, conveyance to their place of destination, etc.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR TO SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA
/s/ RATANOV

[Source: TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1636, ll. 113-116; translated by Bruce McDonald.]