

June 19, 1978

**Memorandum of Conversation between Grabowski
and Sinitsin in Moscow**

Citation:

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Summary:

Describes a conversation that covers a speech Mengistu gave on June 14 and also a general discussion of the Horn of Africa. It focuses on international support to the different parties involved

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

GDR Embassy in Moscow, 19 June 1978, Memorandum of a Conversation between [SED] Comrade Grabowski and the Head of the Third African Department of the [Soviet] MFA, [CPSU] Comrade Sinitsin

On Mengistu's speech of 14 June The speech contains statements which can hardly be read without concern. One still has to assume that the military actions of the separatists have to be energetically opposed, that full and effective control by the PMAC and the Ethiopian armed forces over the cities in the north of the country and their access lines has to be assured. But obviously this was not everything that the speech meant to convey. Intentions for a complete military solution of the Eritrean problem shine through. One cannot recognize any new constructive or concrete suggestions on how to proceed politically. But this is exactly what would be necessary in the current situation and in the context of corresponding necessary military actions. Obviously those forces within the Ethiopian leadership which have always favored a one-sided military solution have gained ground. It also seems important that there is heightened concern about the possibility of a new delay of a solution of the problem contributing to a renewed destabilization of the revolutionary regime. On Ethiopia's international situation The predominant majority of Arab states is increasingly moving against Ethiopia. One should under no circumstances underestimate the danger involved in the clash between the positions of the reactionary and progressive Arab regimes in the Eritrean question which is heightened by the present policy of the Ethiopian leadership. Basically, only the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen is granting real support for the Ethiopian Revolution. Algeria is acting in a very reserved way: while acknowledging the achievements of the Ethiopian Revolution, it does hardly anything concrete in support. Syria and Iraq have clearly expressed once more in recent days that they intend to give support to the [Eritrean] separatists, including military supplies. The Iraqi leadership is also interested in strengthening in every way the pro-Baathistic elements in Eritrea. The Libyan position is quite unclear. Even though they rhetorically recognize the achievements of the Ethiopian Revolution, they, however, less and less explicitly oppose the separation of Eritrea. The impression that the Libyan leadership basically favors the Arabization of Eritrea is not far off. In no case does it want to see relations among the Arab states, especially among the countries of the rejection front, be burdened by the Eritrean question. The pressure exerted by Saudi Arabia and Egypt can definitely be felt. It is difficult to say whether Arab countries will be willing to deploy troop contingents in Eritrea against Ethiopia. They will undoubtedly take into consideration that the predominant majority of African countries would oppose such a move. In their view, Eritrea is a part of Ethiopia. A separation of Eritrea would run counter to their national interest as strong separatist movements exert de-stabilizing influence in many African countries. It is remarkable that similar considerations make even [Sudanese President Jafaar Al-] Numeiri waver. His attitude toward Ethiopia has become more careful, despite pressure from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Besides the Southern problem, several other questions (refugees from Eritrea, interest in the use of the Nile) impel him to keep up somewhat normal relations with Ethiopia. The African countries are in principle opposed to a change of borders. In this question the progressive [countries] and those countries which are largely dependent on the West coincide in their views, though the latter fear the revolutionary changes in Ethiopia. The common danger has even led to a rapprochement between Ethiopia and Kenya. Kenya appears more aggressive and positive [in this question] than some progressive African states. Tanzania's attitude has a very positive effect as it consistently and convincingly opposes the separation of Eritrea. Nigeria, which is under strong pressure by the USA and in which the OAU has, as is well known, much influence, already showed itself to be wavering during the aggression by Somalia. Guinea, which has recently repeatedly pointed out the war of national liberation by the Eritrean people, gives Ethiopia more headaches than support. In sum it can be said that the OAU does not want to allow for a confrontation and is looking for ways to confirm the inviolability of borders and the territorial integrity. How little consistent and passive the OAU is, is proved by the fact that Ethiopia has received little support and that - due to the fear of a possible split - even Somalia's aggression was not condemned. Nevertheless, an intervention by the Arab countries in Eritrea should run into considerable opposition within the OAU. This is in part the effect of the still deeply rooted traditional fear and resistance of the African states against Arab expansionism. At the same time, none of the African countries seriously wants to endanger its relations with the Arab states. This altogether very passive and inconsistent attitude of many African countries and

of the OAU was not an unimportant factor which led the Ethiopian leadership to recognize that in practice only the Socialist countries are Ethiopia's real and principal allies. Among the imperialist countries, one has to pay particular attention to the efforts and activities of the USA, Italy, and France. Their situation in Ethiopia and also with respect to the Eritrean question is quite delicate. All imperialist countries, of course, are interested in the elimination of the Revolutionary achievements in Ethiopia and in the establishment of a pro-Western regime. They are putting all their efforts toward this goal. The NATO countries, led by the USA, base their efforts on the sober assumption that a frontal attack would hardly help to achieve their goals, would only foster the basic anti-imperialist mood of the Ethiopian people and its leadership and drive Ethiopia even closer into the hands of the Socialist community of states. The USA in no case wants to burn all its bridges to Ethiopia. To the best of their abilities, they want to de-stabilize the situation in Ethiopia and the revolutionary regime, and undermine and subvert the revolutionary development in Ethiopia. The imperialists aspire to take advantage of ethnic conflicts, exploit the social instability of the leadership, and encourage nationalist feelings in an effort to further stiffen the Ethiopian attitude in the Eritrean question and thereby aggravate the situation of the revolutionary regime. One also has to take quite seriously the skillful attempts, in particular by the USA, to launch such arguments as "why should the solution of the Eritrean problem be done only by way of cooperation with the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries," "a certain cooperation with the USA and the West could certainly be useful," "the USA after all have considerable possibilities in effectively influencing Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Arab countries," "the West has to offer quite constructive solutions." It is remarkable that Ahmed Nasser has pointed to this question during his talks with the Soviet comrades in Moscow. The Soviet comrades, however, have no indication that these advances are actually effective. One has to assume that the USA would prefer a unified, reactionary Ethiopia to a divided Ethiopia. By using the unity slogan, they are trying to activate those reactionary and nationalist forces, which no doubt still exist, against the revolutionary regime. Considering all these aspects it is not surprising that the USA, Italy, and France have officially opposed Eritrean separatism. It is also symptomatic that the United States is making obtrusive efforts to prove that it was they who recommended to Siad Barre to withdraw his troops from Ethiopia. The cautious handling of aid to Somalia also shows that the USA on no account intend to keep their relations with Ethiopia - in the long run - strained. The USA and China are using Somalia and the provocative actions by Somalia against Ethiopia - which are above all intended to have a de-stabilizing effect--more for anti-Soviet than anti-Ethiopian purposes. They understand that support of the Eritrean separatists would also be directed against the reactionary forces in Ethiopia. With respect to Somalis, the USA are intent on establishing a foothold and bringing the leadership of the country under their firm control. In this regard attention has to be paid to the fact that they also do not consider Barre a solid partner. They assume that he would deceive even the West. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that Barre will soon make a trip to the USA. He wants to gain military support in the amount of \$1 billion. There are indications that the USA is willing to give \$50 million. With respect to similar "military abstention" by China, without doubt other motives play a role: the Chinese leadership does obviously not consider it opportune to display its military weakness in public - and especially in such a burning spot of international politics. Light arms are less revealing, yet they will not allow Somalia to wage a large war against Ethiopia. In addition, China does not want to strain its relations with Africa any further. With respect to the domestic situation in Somalia, one has to first emphasize that Barre is continuing to exploit nationalist slogans and considerable tribal feuds to eliminate progressive elements from the state and party apparatus and to replace them with people faithful to him. This is facilitated by the fact that the party is without a broad social basis and in practice was organized by Barre from above. Barre is careful not to expound a pro-Western course. He has to acknowledge that the progressive development in the past cannot simply be crossed out. The country still has sufficiently powerful progressive forces which for now are silent. He thus prefers to leave many things outwardly as they have been. Officially, the program and the organization of the party are retained. The party organization is even being activated.[Signed] Grabowski.[Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and translated by Christian F. Ostermann.]