

September 5, 1977

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia Ratanov and Mengistu

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia Ratanov and Mengistu", September 5, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1636, ll. 95-9; translated by Bruce McDonald.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110956>

Summary:

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia Ratanov and Mengistu regarding fighting between Ethiopian and Somali forces and Ethiopia's support of the People's Independent Movement in Djibouti

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Ethiopia Ratanov and Mengistu, 5 September 1977

From diary of SECRET
A. P. Ratanov Copy No. 2
6 September 1977

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION
with Chairman of PMAC of Ethiopia
HAILE MARIAMOM MENGISTU

5 September 1977

I received a visit from Haile Mariam Mengistu (Berhanu Bayeh, a member of the Permanent Committee of the PMAC, took part in the discussion) and, pursuant to instructions, informed him about the results of the visit of President Siad Barre of the SDR to Moscow.

1. Having listened, Mengistu asked to convey his appreciation to the Soviet leadership, and personally to Comrade L. I. Brezhnev, for the correct line followed in discussions with Siad Barre, and for the comprehensive assistance rendered to Ethiopia. In this connection, Mengistu noted that at the present time, especially in regard to Soviet supplies of trailers for the transport of tanks, the balance of forces between Ethiopia and Somali was beginning to move in favor of Ethiopia.

Assessing the demarche of Siad Barre as a political maneuver (departing for Moscow, Siad Barre issued an order for an attack on Jijiga), Mengistu announced that an essential condition for Ethiopian-Somali negotiations would be the complete withdrawal of Somali forces from Ethiopian territory. Siad Barre is now attempting to lead astray not only the Soviet Union, but also the PDRY, the intermediation of which he had only recently requested, as well as Madagascar. However, said Mengistu, although the Soviet comrades and comrades from PDRY are taking a principled line in the Somali-Ethiopian conflict, friends in the Republic of Madagascar do not understand everything in the conflict and are inclined to believe the demagogic pronouncements of Siad Barre.

2. Mengistu, who returned on 4 September from Jijiga, told about the battle outside that population center ("the most powerful tank forces in Africa"). On Somalia's side, four motorized mechanical brigades (5, 8, 9 and 10) took part in the fighting. After the Somali attack on Jijiga, which was repelled, Ethiopian forces counter-attacked and repelled the Somalis, completely destroying one tank battalion. The fighting in that region is continuing. It is possible, Mengistu noted in this connection, that Siad Barre counted on a victory outside of Jijiga for the purpose of forcing the Ethiopians into negotiations from a position of strength, and in the event of a defeat, to "demonstrate good will in the eyes of the Soviet Union."

3. Responding to a question from the Soviet Ambassador (a "good question"), Mengistu stated that up until recently the government of the Republic of Djibouti had taken an unfriendly position toward Ethiopia in respect to the Somali-Ethiopian conflict, by prohibiting the landing of Ethiopian aircraft in Djibouti, rendering medical assistance to wounded Somali soldiers, and so forth. Now, however, that the Republic of Djibouti is suffering a serious economic crisis as a result of Somali aggression and, in particular, now that Somali saboteurs stopped the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad from operating, its government has expressed a readiness to enter into a trade relationship with Ethiopia. Mengistu is certain that this positive development in the policy of the Government of the Republic of Djibouti will gain strength.

In Djibouti, Mengistu continued, at the present time there are three groups of political forces: (1) the party of the People's Independence Movement (Marxist-Leninist), advocating independence and creation of a progressive government; (2) the party of the National Union for Independence, advocating nationalist positions for independence; and (3) the right-wing party of the African People's League, advocating, in the final analysis, if not annexation to Somalia, then at least the establishment of special relations with it.

Ethiopia is supporting the People's Independence Movement and advising that party to unite with the National Union for Independence for the establishment of an independent existence for the Republic of Djibouti. The People's Independence Movement does not exclude the possibility that in the future that party will be required to resort to armed methods of conflict against the present government, which is persecuting it.

In the opinion of Mengistu, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries could, with the help of Ethiopia, if necessary, establish contact with the People's Independence Movement and render support to that party. Toward this end the Soviet Committee for Solidarity of the Countries of Asia and Africa could dispatch a delegation to Addis-Ababa or receive in Moscow a delegation of that party. It would be worthwhile to join forces for this purpose, Mengistu stated, in order to prevent the return of Djibouti to the imperialist bloc.

4. In response to related representations of the Soviet Ambassador, Mengistu announced his readiness to meet with the Soviet Chief Military Advisor and asked to be excused for the fact that, being occupied with the leadership of military operations, he had not been able to do this sooner.

5. As concerns the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement, Mengistu stated that the movement had now split into two groups, one of which was inclined toward cooperation with the PMAC. The PMAC will continue its advocacy of the merger of all Marxist-Leninist organizations and groups into a single party and of the creation of a national front.

6. Responding to a question of the Soviet Ambassador, Mengistu stated that the PMAC was preparing to reexamine the ranks of the All-Ethiopian Committee on Peace, Friendship and Solidarity. Subsequently the PMAC will inform the Embassy as to the manner in which it would be most productive for the Soviet Committee on Solidarity of the Countries of Asia and Africa to render cooperation to that Committee. In this connection, as relates to assistance which the Soviet Committee intends to render to Ethiopia, it would be possible to direct this assistance to the address of the Ethiopian Committee on Peace, Friendship and Solidarity, simultaneously apprising the PMAC about this.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR
TO SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA

/s/ A. RATANOV