

February 2, 1977

**Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet
Counselor-Minister in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin with
Political Counselor of the US Embassy in Ethiopia
Herbert Malin**

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Summary:

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Counselor-Minister in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin with Political Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia Herbert Malin regarding the tense situation in Ethiopia and US and Soviet positions with regards to Ethiopia

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From the diary of
S.Y. Sinitsin

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NOTES OF CONFERENCE
with Advisor for Political Issues
of USA Embassy in Ethiopia
HERBERT MALIN
2 February 1977

I met today with Malin in the USA Embassy by preliminary arrangement. The following points of interest were discussed.

Concerning the situation in Ethiopia, Malin noted the tension of the situation caused by the activation of forces opposed to the Derg, especially in the northwestern region of the country which is siding with the Sudan. He directed attention to the "harsh pronouncements" of the Chairman of the PMAC, Teferi Banti, of January 29 and 30 of this year, addressed to the leaders of the Sudan and Somalia, who are pursuing an anti-Ethiopian policy, as well as to his call for a union of "all progressive and patriotic forces" for the defense of "the revolution and the fatherland," in this connection not mentioning the anti-government leftist organization "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party" (EPRP). However, Malin feels that the EPRP will hardly agree to support the call of Teferi Banti, due to its disagreement with the policy of the Derg.

At the same time, he continued, the opposition forces are not united and their joint opposition to the existing regime has a temporary and tactical character. Even if the opposition forces should succeed in overthrowing this regime, a struggle for power will erupt between them, especially between the pro-monarchy "Ethiopian Democratic Union" and the "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party" and other leftist groups. The PMAC, in his opinion, continues to be the only real common national power in contemporary Ethiopia, although its policy does not enjoy support among a significant portion of the population. It is further undoubted that, despite the declarations of the Sudanese and Somalis, present day Ethiopia does not harbor "aggressive designs" in relation to its neighbors, and in any event lacks the opportunity for the same in view of its complex internal problems.

Concerning circumstances in the Military Council itself, after the implementation of its partial reorganization in the end of December [1976] with the aim of reinforcing "collective leadership" of the country, the opinion predominates in Addis Ababa that the policy of the PMAC will acquire a "more moderate" character. However, to judge by the declarations of Teferi Banti, that has not occurred.

In sum, according to Malin's opinion, circumstances in Ethiopia will continue to be complicated and tense for a long time to come.

For his part, he noted that the deterioration of existing circumstances in the country is tied in significant part to the open interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia by the community of Arab countries and other forces, who are aligned in hostility to the

policy of the PMAC and are supporting forces opposed to it. He noted further that, in the final analysis, what is at issue is not merely Ethiopia itself, but the situation in the region as a whole, the efforts of certain Arab circles to establish complete control over the Red Sea, which constitutes an important international maritime route, and the possible eruption here of a completely tense situation and even armed conflict. In this connection the opinion of Malin on the condition of American-Ethiopian relations and prospective development of circumstances in the given region was of interest.

Malin said that until now the American administration, owing to the presidential elections, had not had an opportunity to involve itself to the extent warranted in the development of its policy in this region. Since the change of regime in Ethiopia in 1974, American-Ethiopian relations have had a relatively complex and contentious character. The USA cannot ignore the periodic outbreaks of anti-American activity in the country. Thus, on 27-28 January of this year, in the course of anti-government demonstrations by young protesters in Addis Ababa, glass was broken and gas bombs were hurled at the department of the USIS [United States Information Service] building, in addition to which leaflets of the "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party" were distributed. Similar bombs were hurled at the building of the MAAG [American Military Advisory Group]. In the course of a demonstration of by a group organized by the Military Council on 3 January in Addis Ababa in connection with the above-noted pronouncements of Teferi Banti, anti-American performances by an array of orators were also seen, along with anti-American placards and so forth, although official declarations, including those by Teferi Banti himself, contained no such direct anti-American missives.

At the same time, Malin continued, the Ethiopian government displays an interest in continuing to receive various forms of assistance from the USA, especially military assistance, and frequently talks about the timetable for the delivery of military supplies and so forth. Prior to the change of regime in Ethiopia, American military assistance was at an annual level of 10-12 million American dollars and was administered preferentially on an uncompensated basis (deliveries of arms, ammunition, spare parts, etc.). In recent years, owing to the new policy of the USA in the area of military cooperation with foreign governments, American military assistance to Ethiopia has been granted preferentially on commercial terms, and it includes several types of more advanced armaments, in connection with which the value of the assistance has grown. Thus, the signing of a multi-year contract in 1975 envisions the supply of armaments, spare parts and ammunition in the approximate sum of 250 million American dollars. Already in 1976 the USA supplied Ethiopia with part of those arms, including several "Phantom" fighter planes. This year a supply of several additional fighter planes is contemplated, as well as supplies for the Ethiopian navy, and radar defenses.

Malin noted further that the new Ethiopian administration is pursuing a policy of seeking methods of receiving military assistance from other sources as well, possibly on terms more advantageous to it, including from the USSR (he is aware of the visit by the Ethiopian military delegation to Moscow in December of 1976), as well as the PRC [People's Republic of China], although he doubts that the Chinese are capable of supplying Ethiopia with "serious armaments."

The USA, Malin emphasized, does not oppose the "socialist choice" of new Ethiopia and, as before, firmly supports the principal of respect for its territorial integrity, and is against the partition of Ethiopia. The USA, it is understood, is interested in the guarantee of stability in that region and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

Responding to pertinent questions, he said that the American-Ethiopian agreement of 1953 "on mutual security guarantees" concerned the preferential supply of assistance by the USA to the armed forces of Ethiopia and the guarantee of "certain American interests," first and foremost of which was the operation of the "center of communications" in Asmara, which was of great importance at the time (that center

has now been curtailed in significant part); but, as he understands it, [the agreement] does not call for the direct involvement of American armed forces in the defense of Ethiopia's security, for example, in the case of aggression against it or a threat to its territorial integrity.

Concerning the present deterioration in Ethiopian-Somali relations, as far as Malin knows, the USA has not undertaken any diplomatic steps toward its normalization or restraint of anti-Ethiopian actions by the Arab countries, and in fact the Ethiopian government itself has not raised the issue with the USA.

One of the potential sources for an eruption of a conflict in that region, in Malin's opinion, is the independence of Djibouti that has emerged this year, inasmuch as a serious disagreement exists between Somalia and Ethiopia regarding the future policy of Djibouti. In recent months, the Somalis have succeeded in reinforcing their political influence in Djibouti, and their ties with its present leaders, which has seriously worried the Ethiopians. It is evident, as well, that after its declaration of independence, Djibouti will enter the League of Arab Nations, both in political and economic respects, inasmuch as the position of Djibouti will be complicated following the departure of the French. An array of Arab nations has already established consulates there. The USA also intends to do this prior to the declaration of independence, having requested appropriate permission from the government of France.

In the course of the discussion, Malin expressed interest in the state of Soviet-Ethiopian relations, having come upon rumors concerning the upcoming visit to the USSR of First Deputy Chairman of the PMAC Mengistu Haile Mariam, and also in connection with the negative, as he understands it, attitude of Somalia toward the prospective development of Soviet-Ethiopian cooperation.

I told Malin that our traditionally friendly relations with Ethiopia have a tendency to develop further, as evident from the joint Soviet-Ethiopian communique of 14 July 1976, resulting from the visit to Moscow of an Ethiopian state delegation; the growth of Soviet technical assistance to Ethiopia (teachers in the University, doctors, etc.); the work here during the second half of last year by Soviet economic experts, and so forth. It was pointed out that the continuation of contacts between the two countries at a high level would be the natural procedure under such conditions, although, however, that question had not come up in respect to a concrete plan. I said further that we are aware of the disagreements between Somalia and Ethiopia, and that our unwavering position in that connection is to serve as a motivation for both countries to move towards a peaceful resolution of these disagreements at the negotiating table, in order to prevent a deterioration of circumstances in this region. This relates as well to our position in connection with the current complication in Sudanese-Ethiopian relations. As concerns the future of developments in Soviet-Ethiopian cooperation, it is understood that this cannot be directed against Somalia, with whom we are also developing friendly relations, as the Somali leadership is well aware.

Malin asked, in my opinion, in what spheres would the interests of the USA in Ethiopia not be counter to the interests of the Soviet Union.

I replied, that in my view, these spheres would first and foremost encompass the conduct of a policy of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia; noninterference in its internal affairs; a realistic approach to the social-economic and political transformations taking place in the country by the will of the people; the building of peace and security and a halt to the growth of tensions and conflicts between the countries of that region; and adherence to the principle of unrestricted navigation in the Red Sea, in accordance with recognized standards of international law and the interests of peaceful relations in general.

Thanking me for the conference, Malin expressed a desire for continuation of further contacts and exchanges of opinions regarding the questions discussed, as to which, for his part, he stated his agreement.

COUNSELOR-MINISTER TO THE USSR EMBASSY IN ETHIOPIA

/s/ S. SINITSIN

[Source: TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1638, ll. 28-33; translated by Bruce McDonald.]