

Minutes of the conversation between Comrade Erich Honecker and Comrade Fidel Castro
Sunday, April 3, 1977 between 11:00 and 13:30 and 15:45 and 18:00
House of the Central Committee, Berlin.

Participants: Comrades Hermann Axen, Werner Lamberz, Paul Verner, Paul Markowski (with Comrades Edgar Fries and Karlheinz Mobus as interpreters), Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Osmany Cienfuegos, Raul Valdez Vivo, Jose Abrantes

Comrade Erich Honecker warmly welcomed Comrade Fidel Castro and his Cuban Comrades to this internal conversation on behalf of the Central Committee.

We are very pleased about your visit to the GDR and the opportunity to exchange views about the result of your visit to several African and Arabian countries. On behalf of the Politburo I want to repeat our appreciation and respect for your visits to these countries. I'd ask Comrade Fidel Castro to take the floor...

(...) Fidel Castro: The next day I flew on to Ethiopia. We had earlier agreed that there would be no great reception for me, since at the time they were still fighting the civil war. Shots constantly rang out. Mengistu took me to the old Imperial Palace and the negotiations began on the spot. I found the information that I already had to be confirmed. We continued our negotiations on the following day. Naturally we had to take extensive security precautions. The Ethiopians had requested a division, and I had brought a company of Cuban soldiers with me. The day of my arrival there were rumors of a coup. It did not happen.

I developed the impression that there was a real revolution taking place in Ethiopia. In this former feudal empire, lands were being distributed to the peasants. Each farmer got 10 hectares. There were also reforms in the cities. It was established that each citizen could only own one house. Plots were made available for housing construction.

There is also a strong mass movement. In the capital, 500,000 people can be rapidly mobilized. Our study delegation, after inspecting the army divisions, had determined that of 100 generals, all but two should be chased out. The officers and NCOs have taken over the leadership. At the same time, the leadership is considering creating a Party. There is a harsh struggle against the feudalists in the country. The petit bourgeois powers are mobilizing against the revolution. A strong separatist movement exists in Eritrea. Threats are coming from the Sudan, while Somalia claims 50% of Ethiopia's territory. There have been border clashes in this area for 500 years .

Mengistu strikes me as a quiet, honest and convinced leader who is aware of the power of the masses. He is an intellectual personality who showed his wisdom on February 3. The rightists wanted to do away with the leftists on February 3. The prelude to this was an exuberant speech by the Ethiopian president in favor of nationalism. Mengistu met this challenge. He delayed the meeting of the Revolutionary Council by one hour and had the rightist leaders arrested and shot. A very consequential decision was taken on February 3. The political landscape of the country changed, which has enabled them to take steps that were impossible before then. Before it was only possible to support the leftist forces indirectly, now we can do so without any constraints.

I asked Mengistu whether he was willing to meet with Siad Barre in Aden. We agreed. After concluding my talks I flew on to Aden.

Siad Barre had arrived in Aden that morning. Mengistu arrived in the afternoon. I had a conversation with Siad Barre in which he bared his claws. He told me that if Mengistu was a real revolutionary he should do as Lenin, and withdraw from his territory. Siad Barre took a very hard position. I asked him whether he felt that there had been no real revolution in Ethiopia and that Mengistu was not a real leftist leader. He told me that there had been no revolution in Ethiopia. While in Mogadishu he had shown me a map of Greater Somalia in which half of Ethiopia had been annexed.

After this, I told Mengistu about the substance of his remarks, and asked him to remain quiet. I personally felt that I had invited Mengistu to Aden while there was still a powder keg situation back in his country and that in such a tense situation he should only hear out the Somalis' territorial demands. With regards to my question about the situation of the Ethiopian army, Mengistu said that there were still difficulties but that he didn't think that there was an extreme danger of a collapse.

As the meeting began, Siad Barre immediately began speaking. Siad Barre is a general who was educated under colonialism. The Somali revolution is led by generals who all became powerful under colonial times. I have made up my mind about Siad Barre, he is above all a chauvinist and chauvinism is the most important factor in him. Socialism is just an outer shell that is supposed to make him more attractive. He's received weapons from the socialist countries and his socialism is just for the masses. The Party is there only to support his personal power. In his case there is simply a symbiosis of military dominance: those who studied together under colonialism and those of the same social circle. Something about socialism appeals to him, but overall there is still a lot of inequality and unfairness in his country. His principal ideas are nationalism and chauvinism, not socialism. His goal is old fashioned politics: sweet, friendly words. Siad Barre speaks like a wise man, but he speaks alone. He is different from the many political leaders that I know. Sadat, Boumedienne, Machel, Neto and many others are strong characters, but they can also listen and don't have a dogmatic attitude. One can speak with them. Siad Barre really thinks that he is at the summit of wisdom. Until now everything has gone smoothly for him. The Italians and the British made him a general. The revolution was accomplished in a minute, with hardly a shot. He put on a socialist face and got economic aid and weapons from the Soviet Union. His country is important strategically, and he likes prestige. Barre is very convinced by himself. His socialist rhetoric is unbearable. He is the great socialist, he can't say ten words without mentioning socialism.

With this tone he began to speak to Mengistu. He began giving a lecture on Ethiopia and told Mengistu that he should do as Lenin had done: that he should do away with the Empire. Mengistu remained quiet, he said that Ethiopia was ready and willing to find a solution and that there needed to be the first concrete steps on both sides to achieve a rapprochement. Siad Barre theatrically responded that he was disappointed with Mengistu and that he displayed the same attitude as the Ethiopian Emperor. The Ethiopian revolutionary leadership had the same mentality as Haile Selassie. We had begun the meeting at 11 PM and an end was not in sight. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez proposed the establishment of a standing commission with representatives from Ethiopia, Somalia and the PDRY to find ways to a solution. All the other participants drafted us against our will into this commission.

Siad Barre carried on with his great wise man act, as the great Socialist, the great Marxist. At the same time he spoke demagogically as only one member of the "collective

leadership" with a mandate from the Politburo and of the need to consult with them on all matters. After a brief recess for consultations with his delegation he proposed direct talks between Mengistu and himself.

Mengistu, who had grown progressively more insulted and mistrustful during the speech, said that he was willing to do so, but at a later date. First the question of the commission had to be resolved. We adjourned at 3.15 in the morning. Siad Barre had prepared the text of an agreement in which the idea of the commission was accepted but which directed that its main purpose should be to solve the outstanding territorial questions between Somalia and Ethiopia.

The commission would take this approach from the start. How were the Ethiopians supposed to react to such a provocative proposal?

During the break I had spoken with Mengistu, who did not hide his rejection of Siad Barre's proposal. I also spoke with Siad Barre and asked him whether he was really interested in finding a solution, he said that Mengistu would have to answer that. He went on with his revolutionary rhetoric, about how real socialists, revolutionaries and Marxists could not deny realities. He said that Mengistu was in fact a drastic man, one who has taken drastic measures: why could he not decide right here and now to resolve the question?

In this setting I was faced with the complicated question of either speaking my mind about Siad Barre's position or keeping it to myself. I concluded that I had to speak out for the following reasons:

1. Keeping quiet would have meant endorsing the chauvinistic policy of Somalia, and its consequences. It would also have meant supporting the rightists in Somalia.
2. Not responding to Siad Barre' would mean that any subsequent aid from socialist countries to Ethiopia, no matter how small, would be seen by Siad Barre as a betrayal.
3. Under what circumstances would the PDRY, being right there, support Ethiopia with tanks, trucks and artillery, conveyed with the help of Soviet ships?

In addition, Siad Barre had not only been insulting, he was resorting to thinly veiled threats. At a certain point he said that one could not know where all of this could lead to.

Because of this, I spoke up. I explained that Siad Barre did not believe that there had been a real revolution in Ethiopia, I said that the events of February 3 had totally answered this question and that Mengistu was a revolutionary leader. I went on to say that the events of February 3 were a turning point in the development of the Ethiopian revolution and that Mengistu is the leader of a profound transformation in Ethiopia and that we could not possibly agree with Siad Barre's positions. I said that Siad Barre's positions represented a danger to the revolution in Somalia, endangered the revolution in Ethiopia and that as a result there was the danger of isolating the PDRY. In addition I said that Siad Barre's policies were aiding the right wing in Somalia itself in their efforts to deliver Somalia into the arms of Saudi Arabia and Imperialism.

I said that these policies were weakening Somalia's relations with the socialist countries and would have to lead to the collapse of the revolution in Somalia. I appealed to Siad Barre's and the entire Somali leadership's sense of historical responsibility. I said that I did not think that this would come to a war between Somalia and Ethiopia but that I was worried, since war

would be a very serious thing. I do not believe that there are people who would provoke a war between the peoples.

Immediately after my speaking so frankly, Siad Barre took the floor. He said that he would never want war and that as a socialist and revolutionary he would never allow such a war. If the socialist camp wanted to cut off Somalia then that was the affair of the socialist camp. I had put pressure on Siad Barre, but not on Mengistu to come to this meeting.

Now, I pointed out that I had supported the summit between Siad Barre and Mengistu but didn't talk about Siad Barre's insults vis a vis Mengistu. I said that Cuba had no intention of cutting itself off from the Somali Revolution and that, rather, we supported it. This whole meeting ended without any results.

If we now give our aid to Ethiopia, Siad Barre will have no moral right to accuse us of betrayal, etc. I told him very clearly that there was a revolution in Ethiopia that we had to help.

In any case I had detected during my meetings with Siad Barre a certain irritation on his part with the Soviet Union. He was agitated that the Soviet Union was not delivering spare parts or tractors and that oil came too late, in spite of repeated promises. The Soviet ambassador had explained the state of affairs to us. The Somalis were constantly changing their minds about their requests, which had meant repeated delays. In addition there had unfortunately been an accident with a Soviet oil tanker on its way to Somalia. As I told Siad Barre this he called the Soviets liars. He said this was not the position of the Soviet politburo, but rather the result of sabotage by bureaucrats. His irritation and criticism of the Soviets also showed at other times. He went on to say that there was little drinkable water in his country and that cattle were dying because the pumps provided by the Soviets did not work.

Because of these statements by Siad Barre I see a great danger. That is why I considered it appropriate to give you my frank impressions directly, without euphemisms. I want to discuss my point of view frankly. The socialist countries are faced with a problem. If they help Ethiopia, they will lose Siad Barre's friendship. If they don't the Ethiopian Revolution will founder. That was the most important thing about these matters.

We visited Tanzania because of an old commitment. We've built three schools there and have sent a medical brigade, along with other help. Nyerere had invited us to talk about economic matters above all. The rise in oil prices had affected Tanzania tremendously. Tanzania needs 800,000 tons of oil a year, which requires the combined receipts of the peanut, sisal and cotton crops...

The ANC fighters are trained in Angola, but the Chinese have also provided training here.

Tanzania is involved in the developments in Zimbabwe because of the prestige factor. This involvement allows it to negotiate with Great Britain and the United States over Zimbabwe and to define a role for itself.

The ZANU has 5000 Chinese trained men in fighting units. The liberation fighters in Namibia are being trained in Angola however. Cuba and the Soviet Union have both set up training camps for them. The ZAPU is supported by Angola.

We flew directly from Tanzania to Mozambique. There used to be differences between us and the FRELIMO, going back to the times when FRELIMO was in Tanzania and Che Guevara had spoken to Mondlane there. At the time Mondlane did not agree with Che and said so publicly. Thereafter there were news articles against Mondlane in Cuba. Later Mondlane

took correct positions, but only in internal conversations and things remained up in the air. FRELIMO took good positions during the liberation struggle in Angola. But in our opinion they were not sufficiently combative. For a time FRELIMO was close to Nyerere. Carlos Rafael had spoken to Samora Machel in Colombo. After that we sent a Cuban delegation to Mozambique and were invited to visit. FRELIMO accepted all of our suggestions for the visit: it would be discreet, which was convenient for me. Samora Machel was really a surprise for me. I learned to know him as an intelligent revolutionary who took clear positions and had a good relationship with the masses. He really impressed me. We spoke with each other for one and a half days. We support Mozambique. Machel asked us to send 300 technicians and was interested in Cuba's experiences, especially in economics. Before this we did not know for sure what influence the Chinese had on him. Today he is getting closer to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. He got a loan from the Soviets for weapons of 100 million rubles. In addition the Soviets have delivered aircraft and anti-aircraft batteries.

We were very pleased with our visit to Mozambique. I want to say that we consider it very important.

Kaunda also wanted me to visit him. I had been in Africa for a long time, however, and did not want to extend my stay. Besides which the imperialist penetration has advanced far in Zambia. In the Angola matter, Zambia took a very wrong position, in spite of the fact that she was not forced to do so. We had agreed with Angola not to visit Zambia. A few days before my visit to southern Africa the Katanga battles had begun and N'Gouabi was murdered. I'd been invited to Madagascar, but did not want to stay in Africa any longer. During a press conference in Dar Es Salaam I had categorically denied that Cuba was in any way involved in the Katanga battles. I explained that the situation in Angola was different from those in Zimbabwe and Namibia. I had answered all questions in very general terms.

Things are going well in Angola. They had achieved good progress in their first year of independence. There's been a lot of building and they are developing health facilities. In 1976 they produced 80,000 tons of coffee. Transportation means are also being developed. Currently between 200,000 and 400,000 tons of coffee are still in warehouses. In our talks with Neto we stressed the absolute necessity of achieving a level of economic development comparable to what had existed under Portuguese colonialism. Over 300 Cubans are working in the health clinics. Fishing is recovering and the sugar plantations are almost all back in production. Within six months they will have reestablished transportation links. Even in education a lot is being done. The MPLA is doing a good job with mass organizing. Women are very politically active. There are no grounds for dissatisfaction there. Angola has a good capacity to earn hard currency. Oil revenues are about 500 million dollars a year, without them having to do anything. They also generate about 300 million from coffee. Now they are setting up a Party in Angola. The fundamental decisions in domestic and foreign policy are correct. We are still concerned about one area: the development of the Army. Parts of the Defense Ministry are doing nothing to fight bandits in the north and south of the country. The bands are particularly active in the center of the country. With our help they can deliver heavy blows against them. The Soviet military advisors are active at the highest levels. Our advisers are active at the Brigade level and we are helping them with the training of military cadres and the fight against the bandits. The Angolan Defense Ministry underestimates the fight against the bandits they are not deploying regular troops against the bandits. We understand that the Soviet military advisers are primarily concerned with helping them to organize the regular

army and are not interested in helping in the fight against bandits. It is difficult for us to fight against the bandits on our own. Our comrades have had a lot of difficulties and have spent many bitter hours fighting them. The Cubans cannot do it alone. The state of the army unsettles us. In one region a brigade has been without a commander or chief of staff for a long time. Until now the Cuban units have been the only ones fighting the bandits. The major effort must however be carried out by the Angolans themselves. The Cuban troops are above all concentrated in Cabinda and in the defense of the capital, Luanda. I spoke with Neto about the situation in the army and told him that things had to change. The Defense Minister is a good old fighter with the MPLA, but that hasn't helped. An army general staff does not really exist. The country may have 70,000 men under arms but the army is practically not organized. The Soviet advisers are primarily concerned with planning. Neto wanted us to take the entire army in hand. In practical terms that might have been the best solution, but not politically. The Soviet Union is the chief weapons supplier and the Angolans must speak directly to the Soviets. Neto himself must solve this problem. We also cannot commit our troops to the fight against bandits because women and children are being killed in these combats and we cannot take on such a responsibility.

Neto made a very good impression. He is a very imposing man, very clever and decisive. He is increasingly the leading figure in the Angolan leadership. There are also opportunists in Angola however. Sometimes they try to approach us or the Soviets and to spread certain opinions. We are very clearly taking a line in favor of Aghostino Neto. There is also evidence of black racism in Angola. Some are using the hatred against the colonial masters for negative purposes. There are many mulattos and whites in Angola. Unfortunately racist feelings are spreading very quickly and Neto has taken an expected position here, naming both whites and mulattos as ministers. Neto is of course ready to intervene in this question decisively. He is open to suggestions and arguments. The Defense Minister is not as strong. He does not have high standards. Because of this a lot of cadres don't have the right attitudes. There are cases in which the military commanders have not visited their military district for five months. Many ministers were appointed because they were old war comrades of Neto's. A fact remains: the army and general staff are not working properly. Cadres, overall are being developed well in Angola, but the Army is the most important. Things are going well, with the exception of the army.

We are giving Angola a great deal of military support. At the end of the liberation war, 36,000 Cuban troops and 300 tanks were deployed. The South African mercenaries were quickly demoralized. The USA talks about 12,000 Cuban soldiers. We are reducing our troop strength continuously. This year we plan to leave 15,000 men stationed there. By the end of 1978 there should be only 7,000, although it's probable that the reductions won't proceed quite as rapidly. The main force is stationed in the south. If the Cuban military were not deployed in Angola the situation would be a lot more complicated.

The number of Cuban civilian advisers and experts will rise to 4,000 this year. Until now this aid has been provided free of charge. Starting in 1977, however, Angola is committed to paying for the living expenses of our specialists, with an additional increase in financial responsibilities scheduled for 1978. Our military aid will remain free of charge. The Soviet Union has committed itself to supplying the entire material needs of our units in Angola. While in Angola I also dealt with the question of the liberation movements in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Namibia's liberation fighters are good, they are also

helping Angola with the anti-bandit combats. The South African ANC is a serious organization. Its president, Oliver Tambo, is a serious politician. Three quarters of the ANC Central Committee membership is communist. They have a very clear political position with regards to Angola, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. The people have taken up the struggle in South Africa, in time the ANC will be a serious power.

The situation is most complicated in Zimbabwe. The ZANU have 1,000 armed fighters. The Chinese and Nyerere are influential with the ZANU. The ZAPU, however, haven't had any military forces of their own. The best man in the ZAPU, General Secretary Moyo, was murdered. During the Angolan war of liberation, the Angolan leadership could not give its support to the liberation movement in Zimbabwe. At the time Mozambique was leaning against Tanzania and supported the ZANU. Today things are different. Angola's influence is 14 increasing and Mozambique is growing closer and closer to Angola. The Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe is made up of both the ZANU and the ZAPU, but this is only a formality. N'komo is supported by Angola, the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. N'Guabi is supported by Tanzania and the Chinese. Now there is the possibility of depriving the Chinese and the Tanzanians of their influence in Zimbabwe. Zambia is supporting the Zimbabwean liberation movement for the prestige factor that's involved and because it wants to counteract Angola's influence with N'komo. With the positive development of Angola and Mozambique the perspectives of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe can only improve. It is possible that Angola, Mozambique and Zambia will move forward together. The ZAPU must establish its own armed forces as soon as possible. There are today 6,000 ZAPU men in Angola, and one could make an Army out of them. That would facilitate uniting the ZAPU and the ZANU. I told Neto about this and he agreed. Above all that would be a way to roll back China's influence. N'komo also understands this. He is very intelligent and talks to Samora Machel a great deal. Unfortunately he is very fat, and so his health is not good.

I told him and others that the personal safety of all the liberation leaders was in danger. The imperialists would be moved to try and murder them all. They've already murdered N'Gouabi and Moyo. Because of this it is absolutely necessary to take steps to increase security measures for the leaders.

The liberation struggle in Africa has a great future. From a historical perspective the facts are that the imperialists cannot turn things back. The liberation struggle is the most moral thing in existence. If the socialist states take the right positions, they could gain a lot of influence. Here is where we can strike heavy blows against the imperialists. The liberation army in Katanga is led by a general. These people used to favor Katanga's secession from Zaire. Later they went to Angola, were trained by the Portuguese and fought against the MPLA, until they went over to Neto's side; now they could not fall out with Neto. They are good soldiers. Its military leader is a general in the gendarmerie who now wants to make a revolution in Zaire. These people are now saying that they are good Marxist-Leninists and that they now longer advocate the secession of Katanga. They went off in four different directions with four battalions. We didn't know about this, and we think that the Angolan's didn't either. The frontal states were split 50/50 in favor of supporting the Katanga liberation movement. We gave them a categorical explanation that Cuba was in no way involved in this. The armed groups are marching forward. Their commander sends a daily telegram to the Angolan leadership and to the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Luanda describing his advances and asking for support. The Yankees are wavering. They know very well that there are no Cuban

units involved. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez is charged with speaking to the French and Belgian ambassadors to protest against their countries' involvement and to pressure them to stop. We want them to be worried, when they are organizing their mercenaries, and to think that our troops are very near.

Angola has a moral duty, and a desire, to support the Katanga liberation movement. They are angered by Mobutu's position. Angola has asked us and the Soviets to give them weapons for delivery to the Katangans. We should wait for developments though. Mobutu is an incompetent and weak politician. It's possible that he will not survive this crisis. The frontal states are now in favor of supporting Katanga, while Angola favors direct aid. We don't want to be involved in order not to give the USA an excuse to intervene. As I mentioned we will try to put pressure on Belgium and France. It will be a great event if Mobutu falls.

In the People's Republic of the Congo there is a confusing situation following N'Gouabi's murder. The interior and defense ministers are competing for the leadership. There are also pro-westerners in the military council. It is practically certain that the rightists murdered N'Gouabi, although the left wing was also dissatisfied with him. In other words there was a relatively uncertain situation there. We sent Comrade Almeyda to the funeral, and hope that the situation will stabilize. We were also asked to send a military unit to Brazzaville. The internal problems of the country must be solved by the Congolese themselves however. We have stationed small military units in Pointe Noire and in Cabinda.

There were several requests for military aid from various sides: Qadaffii, Mengistu and the Congolese leaders. During our stay in Africa we sent Carlos Rafael Rodriguez to Moscow to confer with our Soviet comrades and to Havana for consultations with our leadership. In order to find the best solution we must think through this question quietly and thoroughly and consider it in terms of the overall situation of the socialist camp. Above all we must do something for Mengistu. Already we are collecting old weapons in Cuba for Ethiopia, principally French, Belgian and Czech hand-held weapons. About 45,000 men must be supplied with weapons. We are going to send military advisers to train the Ethiopian militia in weapons-use. There are many people in Ethiopia who have joined with the army. We are supporting the development of a militia. Meanwhile the situation in Eritrea is difficult. There are also progressive people in that liberation movement, but, objectively, they are playing a reactionary role. The Eritrean separatist movement is being supported by the Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Ethiopia has good soldiers and a good military tradition, but they need time to organize their army. Mengistu asked us for 100 trainers for the militia, now he is asking us for military advisers to build up regular units. Our military advisory group is active at the staff level. The Ethiopians have the personnel and the economic means necessary to build up their army. Rumors have been spread lately that the reactionaries will conquer Asmara in two months. The revolution in Ethiopia is of great significance. With regard to military aid for the PR Congo and the Libyans we have not yet come to a decision.

I had consultations with Boumedienne in Algeria and asked for his opinion. He assured me that Algeria would never abandon Libya. Algeria is very concerned with the situation in the Mediterranean because of its security interests. It is in favor of supporting Libya, as long as military aid is confined to the socialist camp. That is not only a question between Cuba and Algeria. If we are to succeed in strengthening the revolution in Libya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the PDRY and Angola we must have an integrated strategy for the whole African continent.

Angola is becoming closer to the socialist camp. It bought 1.5 billion rubles of weapons from the Soviets. Boumedienne thinks that Sadat is totally lost to us. In Syria there is also no leftist movement any more, especially after the Syrians defeated the progressive powers and the PLO in Lebanon.

Indira Gandhi gambled away the elections.

In Africa we can inflict a severe defeat on the entire reactionary imperialist policy. We can free Africa from the influence of the USA and of the Chinese. The developments in Zaire are also very important. Libya and Algeria have large territories, Ethiopia has a great revolutionary potential. So there is a great counterweight to Sadat's betrayal in Egypt. It is even possible that Sadat will be turned around and that the imperialist influence in the Middle East can be turned back.

This must all be discussed with the Soviet Union. We follow its policies and its example.

We estimate that Libya's request is an expression of trust. One should not reject their request. Cuba cannot help it alone