

REPORT ON THE CONVERSATION WITH [VICE-PRESIDENT] CARLOS RAFAEL RODRÍGUEZ, MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO OF THE CP CUBA, ON FEBRUARY 13, 1978 IN HAVANA [SED CENTRAL COMMITTEE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS -80-, FEBRUARY 16, 1978]

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[Participants: Comrade Polanco, Deputy Head of CC Department for International Relations CP Cuba; Comrade Heinz Langer, Ambassador and Plenipotentiary Extraordinary to Cuba]

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Based on the success at the eastern front and carried by the euphoria of victory and given the possibility to withdraw strong and experienced Ethiopian units, the Ethiopian leadership could aspire to a decisive and quick military solution in Eritrea. Unfortunately there are significant forces within the PMAC calling for such a solution.

Comrade Mengistu has now asked the leadership of the CP Cuba for the second time not only to give military support in Ogaden but also to deploy Cuban units in Eritrea.

Towards the end of last year he dramatically called on us arguing that Cuban troops should immediately intervene in Eritrea since otherwise the final loss of this area was imminent and hence would have incalculable consequences for the Ethiopian Revolution. In close consultation with the Soviet comrades, Comrade Fidel Castro favored a massive intervention in Ogaden against the Somali invasion. He emphasized that this now was clearly a domestic Ethiopian matter and that we would have the OAU, the African states, international laws and conventions, as well as the UN on our side. Comrade Castro refused to intervene in Eritrea. We have promised every kind of aid except for military units to our Ethiopia comrades. We have based this on the view that this was a justified national cause of the Eritrean people which could not be solved militarily. Now, a few days ago, Comrade Mengistu has asked again and spoke of a dramatic and dangerous development in the situation; again he demanded to have Cuban units deployed at the Eritrean front.

Comrade Fidel Castro and all the members of our politburo are of the opinion that we cannot afford to make any mistakes in our handling of the Eritrean question. A wrong move now could endanger our entire policy and important positions in Africa. We would be confronted by the majority of African states, the Arabs, international organs, probably also the countries of the Non-Alignment Movement and others. Therefore we continue to oppose a military intervention in Eritrea. In coordination with our Soviet comrades we have agreed to occupy the entrance to the Mits'iwa Islands from where a certain degree of control can be exerted and from where in an extreme emergency a limited military intervention would be possible.

In this connection it is very important that we immediately think about Aforki's demand of a guarantee by the Socialist countries. It might be necessary to work out a common basic view with the Soviet Union before the next meeting because it is to be expected that Aforki will not only present concrete proposals but will also expect from the representatives of the Socialist countries a concrete response. Our view is based on the fact that we have and will take on a moral obligation towards the Eritreans when we urge upon them a political and peaceful solution according to the

concept agreed upon among us. They could for sure then not withhold the pressure of the enemy on their own. There is the danger here too that the Ethiopian comrades may not pay attention to the changed situation and are looking for easy success which would be costly for us in political and moral terms with other countries.

[...]

- On the situation in the Ogaden, Comrade Rodriguez informed us that a large counter-offensive had been in preparation since 25 December 1977. There have been two major campaigns in recent days which caused losses of more than 3000 men on the other side. It is a serious problem that the Ethiopian comrades do not want to take prisoners of war and thus act very cruelly. These blows have caused the enemy large material losses as well while our own have been very small. In the last movement in the Northeast there was a smaller loss of human life but the material losses have been very great. The Somalis have over 40 tanks, numerous medium-weight and heavy weapons, flack artillery, armored cars and a great amount of weapons and munitions. In part, they have left behind NATO war material which was not even unwrapped. In the fights around Dire Dawa, the Somalis had to pull back leaving almost their entire armament.

Up to now, there have been only preparatory blows. Most of the units marked for action have not been deployed yet, and the main blow has not even begun yet. The enemy is fleeing and giving up positions faster than had been expected. We are therefore in a situation where we have to undertake a series of fast actions so that the enemy will not have time to rebuild his forces. It is our plan to complete the main actions by the end of February 1978. This means that by early March we can expect a great victory at this front. This is, as is well known, the time for the next meeting. This will have a great effect. As agreed upon with our Soviet comrades, in no case will we transgress Somali borders.

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[Source: Stiftung "Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv"(Berlin), DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and transl. by Christian F. Ostermann (The National Security Archive)]