

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH THE DEPUTY HEAD OF THE 3. AFRICA-DEPARTMENT IN THE MID, COMRADE S. J. SINITSIN, ON FEBRUARY 16, 1978  
[EMBASSY OF THE GDR IN THE USSR, POLITICAL DEPARTMENT, MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 17, 1978]

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[...] Comrade Sinitsin gave his estimate of the situation in Ethiopia and on the Horn of Africa.

1. The counteroffensive of the Ethiopian armed forces against the Somali troops in Ogaden is considered positive. We are currently not dealing with a general offensive but the recovery of important strategic points which will then allow for the complete repulsion of Somali military from Ethiopian territory. So far, a 30 km to 70 km deep zone has been recovered. The air superiority of the Ethiopian forces has a great impact. Comrade Sinitsin considered the prospect for a successful conclusion of the fighting for the Ethiopians rather good; he also emphasized, however, that military encounters will intensify. Such factors as the general mobilization in Somalia and increased arms deliveries by the West will have some effect. Also, one cannot forget the fact that significant parts of the Ethiopian armed forces have to be kept in the North and are involved in fighting counterrevolutionary groups in Eritrea. Another part of the army is necessary to guarantee security towards the Sudan. The Ethiopian army can still not be considered a homogeneous unit. Large parts of the cadres, in particular the officer corps, were taken over from the imperial government. Sabotage, insubordination, even withdrawal without fighting are serious occurrences. Great attention is therefore paid to the reorganization of the army and the concerted build-up of a popular militia. The biggest problems here are once again the cadres and their training. One should also not underestimate the problems caused by the change-over in the army from Western to Socialist weapons systems which have to be managed and deployed efficiently.

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2. The international situation of the conflict in the Horn of Africa is characterized by the efforts of the imperialist countries to keep a crisis atmosphere on the African continent in order to achieve their long-term objectives. These plans are bound to fail with the increasing progress towards a military solution of the conflict in favor of Ethiopia. Western counter-efforts can clearly be recognized. Although the Barre regime is embarrassing to the western powers, they are using it as a tool in their attempt to pursue their interests.

They use the lie of alleged aggressive designs on Ethiopia's part in order to conceal their direct activities in support of Somalia. The declaration of Western powers that they would not make weapons available to Somalia is refuted by arms deliveries via third, in particular reactionary Arab countries and via "private" firms. Simultaneously, the Western countries are increasing their politico-diplomatic pressure for the "independence" of the Ogaden to at least achieve a partial success which would improve the prospects for the realization of their long-term goals.

From this point of view we have to understand the willingness of the Western powers to attain an armistice without the withdrawal of Somali troops from Ethiopian territory. It is their goal to give Somalia the opportunity to consolidate its position on Ethiopian territory and to achieve, through protracted negotiations, a situation like the one in the Middle East. Therefore the Soviet

Union and the Socialist countries fully support the basic Ethiopian position: armistice, withdrawal of Somali troops, and political negotiations.

The direct and indirect [Western] support measures for Somalia illustrate the demagogic character of the declarations of the Western governments which shows itself in the comparison of Somalia with Ethiopia, the comparison of an aggressor with its victim, and the attempt to blame the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries for the heightening of the conflict and thus to keep them from further supporting Ethiopia. The Ethiopian leadership is carefully observing the attitude and actions of the imperialist states and differentiates between them. In this respect one has to view Mengistu's declaration announcing to the United States, Great Britain and the FRG that he would break diplomatic relations if they continued their direct support of Somalia. Hence he is clearly considering with subtle differences states such as Italy which as a former colonial power is currently taking on a flexible position in Ethiopia, and France which is above all interested in the consolidation of its position in Djibouti.

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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)]