

**March 30, 1988**  
**Telegram from Wolfgang Bayerlacher to Erich  
Honecker**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

A report by GDR Ambassador to Ethiopia, Wolfgang Bayerlacher, on the situation in the country.

**Credits:**

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TELEGRAM

[GDR Embassy in Ethiopia]

Addis Abeba Instant Message

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Comrade Erich Honecker

The current situation in Ethiopia is characterized by a further aggravation of the domestic situation, as well as by active operations by the leadership around Mengistu to counter this development. On 19 March the 'Eritrean People's Liberation Front' (EPLF) has launched a military offensive and took the strategically important city of Afabet (100 kilometers north of Asmara), which had been defended by about 20,000 men (three divisions). Extensive war material got captured.

In Eritrea, about 200 kilometers west of Asmara, the towns of Tesenay, Haykota, and Ali Ghider were conquered. Kenen, in northwestern direction of Asmara, is threatened. The danger for Asmara is growing. An attack on the Red Sea port of Massawa was beaten back by the army.

The 'Tigray People's Liberation Front' (TPLF) has the majority of the roads in Tigray under its control and is increasingly threatening important cities, including the regional capital of Mek'ele.

Both organizations are enjoying the support of the majority of populations in these regions. This does enable them to infiltrate important cities, especially Asmara. The military activities by the adversary are supported by growing ideological diversion, especially so through 13 radio stations supported by the United States and other Western countries. The offensive by both organizations does highlight that efforts by the Ethiopian government to improve relations with Arab countries in order to minimize their aid for the EPLF and the TPLF did not result in desired successes. The offensive by the South Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), supported by Ethiopia in the South and in part of the Northeast of Sudan, has provided the Sudanese government with the opportunity to persuade Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi-Arabia, the Emirates, and other Arab states to provide increasing military support for Sudan, and especially also to the EPLF and TPLF. This included for the first time also modern weaponry.

These deliveries, as well as captured arms, do enable the EPLF and TPLF to move from guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare operations.

Currently there does not exist a direct military threat to Ethiopia from the side of Sudan and Somalia because of their own domestic unstable situations.

The defeat of the Ethiopian armed forces in the Northern region was caused by an extraordinarily low fighting morale and willingness of the ground forces stationed there. The leadership had according information, so that Mengistu had felt the need for an extensive inspection of both regions over 17 days in February. The situation in these armed units is characterized by insufficient political-ideological and social work. Mengistu has immediately introduced energetic measures to stabilize the situation in the armed forces. Their effects are not yet visible.

There does exist a complicated economic and social-political situation in the country. As a result, there has been a decline of mass base support for the revolution. Such does limit the options of the leadership for stabilizing the situation. The economic development of Ethiopia is showing further trends toward worsening. There is another drought, especially in the Northern regions. It required to import 1.3 million tons of food from abroad for about 7 million people, what did aggravate the situation further. Several measures by the leadership, among them tentative economic reforms especially in the field of agriculture, are aimed at stabilization and self-sufficiency with regard to food supply. Results are to be expected here only over the long run.

The difficult situation makes it evident that the attractiveness of the WPE [Worker's Party of Ethiopia] and its relationship with the masses is not sufficiently developed due to both objective and subjective reasons. The ideological work is not on level with the tasks required. A concept towards an offensive communication of the policy of the party, as well as concerning the confronting of enemy propaganda, cannot be identified.

The danger to the revolution is forcing Mengistu to attempt a stabilization of the situation primarily by military means. Extensive regroupings of armed forces in the North have begun. Reserves have been called in and the provision of reserves from the interior has been initiated. Further measures have been introduced to strengthen the people's militias and their armed equipment. On 28 March Mengistu has received the Soviet Ambassador and forwarded aid requests to overcome the situation as described above. A group of Soviet generals has arrived on 28 March to support the consolidation of the military situation.

According to information we received, the situation in the capital is normal. The security regime has been strengthened.

The leadership over mentioned processes towards stabilization of the situation is in the hands of Mengistu.

I have informed Comrade H. Tisch about the aid requests and our reaction to them.

Bayerlacher

30 March, 08:20 Hours

CC:

Comrade Axen