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**Third African Department, Soviet Foreign Ministry,
Information Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial
Disputes**

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Summary:

Third African Department, Soviet Foreign Ministry, Information Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial Disputes and the position of the USSR in settling the dispute

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Third African Department, Soviet Foreign Ministry, Information Report on Somali-Ethiopian Territorial Disputes, 2 February 1977

SOMALIA'S TERRITORIAL

DISAGREEMENTS WITH ETHIOPIA AND THE POSITION OF THE USSR

(Brief Information Sheet)

Somalia claims a significant part of Ethiopian territory (the Ogaden region) on the basis of the fact that a large number of Somalis live there (around 1 million people).

Ethiopia totally rejects the territorial claims of the SDR, basing its position on the fact that the borders with Somalia were set by international agreements, particularly the Agreement on the demilitarization of the Ethiopia-Somalia border, which was signed in 1908 between Ethiopia and Italy. They also refer to the resolution of the OAU which was accepted in Cairo in 1964, which says that all African states must recognize the borders which existed at the moment when they were granted independence.

The tension in relations with Somalia led imperial Ethiopia to draw close to Kenya (the Somalis did not decline either from demanding the unification with Somalia of the Northern border region of Kenya, which is populated by Somalis) on an anti-Somali basis. In 1963 there was a Treaty on joint defense signed between the two countries.

At the beginning of 1964 a direct military confrontation broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia, although the conflict was soon settled through the mediation of the OAU. The Soviet government also called on both sides with an appeal to quickly cease fire and to resolve all disputed issues in a peaceful way.

During 1970-71 a series of Ethiopia-Somalia negotiations were conducted which ended without result. At the end of 1972-beginning of 1973 a series of border incidents broke out (in the regions of Washen, Bongol, Dolo, and others) which were smoothed over by peaceful means.

The tension in relations between Ethiopia and Somalia many times attracted the attention of the Organization of African Unity. However, efforts to find a mutually acceptable solution to the territorial argument between Ethiopia and Somalia within the framework of the OAU so far have yielded no result.

At the session of the OAU Assembly which took place in Addis Ababa in January 1976, two meetings took place, at Siad Barre's initiative, between him and the chairman of the PMAC of Ethiopia, during which the question of bilateral relations was raised. The leaders of both countries asserted that the exchange of opinions was productive, and expressed the intention to continue the dialogue. Practical steps in this direction, however, were not undertaken.

The Somali leaders, though they stress that the issue must be resolved by peaceful means, as in the past do not repudiate the demand about the unification of the Ogaden with Somalia. According to available information, the Somalis continue their activity in the Ogaden, throwing their armed detachments in there under the command of line officers.

The new Ethiopian leadership, refusing to discuss the territorial issue, expresses readiness to conduct negotiations on the demilitarization of the existing border and speaks out in favor of the development of economic, cultural, and other relations with the SDR.

Relations between the two countries are becoming more complex also because of Djibouti - a French territory of Afars and Issa (FTAI), to which France intends to grant

independence this year. For Ethiopia this territory represents a vital interest in view of the fact that Djibouti is the terminus of the railway from Addis Ababa, by way of which the basic part of Ethiopia's foreign trade freight is carried. The Somalis, for their part, consider the FTAI, or, as they call that territory, "French Somalia," one of five parts of "Greater Somalia," in view of the fact that its population to a significant extent consists of tribes which are related to the Somalis.

At the XXX session of the UN GA, a resolution was accepted in which was asserted the unconditional right of the people of Djibouti to quick and unconditional independence, and also contained an appeal to all states to "desist from any claims whatever on that territory and declare null and void any actions in support of such claims." Both Ethiopia and Somalia voted for that resolution.

At the same time the government of the SDR does not hide its hopes that once having become independent the population of Djibouti will come out in favor of unification with Somalia. This was displayed, in particular, at the XIII Assembly of the OAU (July 1976), where the Somali representatives did not support the demand of Ethiopia for a joint declaration to repudiate territorial claims, asserting that the sovereignty of Djibouti should not depend on "threats of police actions from the power-guarantors." In December 1976, President Siad, in a communication to the heads of African states, declared even more precisely that "if the goal of these guarantees will force Somalia to reject our blood ties, the common history and culture which tie us with the people of Djibouti, then we declare, that is impossible."

Nonetheless, Somalia, just like Ethiopia, voted for the resolution of the XXXI session of the UN GA of 23 November 1976, on Djibouti, which once again affirmed the right of the people of that territory to independence. Representatives of both countries to the UN declared that their governments will recognize, respect, and observe the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Djibouti after it receives independence.

However, in the course of the discussion at the UN General Assembly session, the speeches of the Somalia and Ethiopia delegations showed that, as in the past, serious disagreements remain between these countries about the ways to resolve the Djibouti problem. They showed particularly on the issue of the return to the territory of political refugees. The Ethiopians accused the Somalis of intending to send to Djibouti their own citizens, disguised as refugees, so as to ensure as a consequence its joining with the SDR.

The position of the Somali leadership regarding Eritrea also leaves a negative imprint on Somalia-Ethiopia relations. Providing support to Eritrean separatists, Somalia, to all appearances, is counting on the fact that the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia will lead to a split of the multinational Ethiopian state, which will facilitate the unification of the Ogaden territory with Somalia.

The Somali government recently has activated its propaganda against Ethiopia and its activity in the international arena, with the goal of enlisting support for its position vis-a-vis the new Ethiopian regime, which, as it believes, is conducting in relation to Somalis the former imperial "colonial policy." This point of view was expressed by the vice president of the SDR [Gen. Mohamed Ali] Samantar during his visit last year to a number of European socialist countries and to Cuba. However, in no instance did it meet with understanding. Somalia is also taking certain steps in Arab countries so as to receive support for its claims to Ogaden and Djibouti. In this regard the Somalis point to the fact that the joining of Djibouti to the "Arab world" (SDR is a member of the Arab League) promises it not insignificant benefits in realizing plans to turn the Red Sea into an "Arab lake."

Arab reaction supports and heats up the aspirations of the Somalis, with the goal of

putting pressure on the progressive Ethiopian leadership. President of Somalia Siad intends in the beginning of 1977 to complete a trip to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and several other Arab countries. As he left in January 1977 for Khartoum to prepare for this visit, Member of the Politburo of the CC of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party [Ahmed] Suleiman [Abdullah] public expressed himself in vulgar anti-Ethiopian thrusts. Suleiman openly spoke out in support of the Eritrean separatists, and also in favor of a proposal to move the headquarters of the OAU from Addis Ababa to another capital, a proposal for which Sudan and several African countries with a pro-Western orientation recently expressed support.

Beginning in the 1960s, in almost every instance of a serious aggravation of Ethiopia-Somalia relations, Ethiopia and Somalia have appealed to the Soviet government with a request to assert influence on the government of the other country with the goal of normalizing the situation. Recently, both Somalia and Ethiopia have repeatedly called for more active participation by the Soviet Union in settling their bilateral relations. In this regard each of them is counting on the Soviet Union to support precisely their position, using for this its authority and friendly relations with the opposing side.

In January 1976, Siad Barre informed the Soviet government of [Somalia's] intention to enter into negotiations with the Ethiopian leadership about the creation of a Federation of Somalia and Ethiopia. In this regard the President requested the Soviet side to join the negotiations as a mediator. Insofar as the goal and character of a federation, as well as the possible position of Ethiopia, were not clear, it was decided to avoid defining our attitude to this initiative and mediation on this issue. In November 1976 Siad Barre expressed the wish that the Soviet side would report to the Ethiopian leadership about the wish of the SDR to begin a peaceful dialogue with Ethiopia on the disputed issues which they have. This wish was brought to the attention of the Chairman of the Committee of the PMAC for political and foreign affairs through the Soviet Embassy in Addis Ababa.

At the end of 1976 the Cubans and South Yemenis came out with an initiative to provide mediatory services towards a settlement of Somalia-Ethiopia relations. The Somali government, not rejecting this proposal, spoke out in favor of the Soviet Union as well participating directly in the mediation. The Ethiopian side, regarding the mediation initiative favorably, did not express an analogous wish. Cuba and the PDRY through diplomatic channels are taking certain steps to organize meetings between the leaders of Somalia and Ethiopia.

The position of the Soviet Union on the question of the Ethiopia-Somalia territorial dispute, which many times has been brought to the attention of the governments of both countries, is that Ethiopia and the SDR must take all possible measures to settle their disagreements by means of negotiations and to find a way to lessen the tension in Ethiopia-Somalia relations.

The friendly advice of the USSR government, aimed at a settlement of Ethiopia-Somalia relations, has been favorably accepted by the governments of both countries. In responses to our appeals both Ethiopia and Somalia have announced their readiness to resolve all disputed issues by means of negotiations and not to allow the unleashing of a new armed conflict.

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