

March 18, 1977

**Memorandum of conversation between Soviet acting
Charge d'affaires in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin and
Ethiopian official Maj. Berhanu Bayeh**

Citation:

"Memorandum of conversation between Soviet acting Charge d'affaires in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin and Ethiopian official Maj. Berhanu Bayeh", March 18, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1638, ll. 93-97
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/111842>

Summary:

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Acting Charge d'affaires in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin and Ethiopian official Maj. Berhanu Bayeh concerning the strained relations between Somalia and Ethiopia and and Ethiopian-Soviet cooperation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Acting Charge d'affaires in Ethiopia S. Sinitsin and Ethiopian official Maj. Berhanu Bayeh, 18 March 1977 TOP SECRET Copy No. 2 From the journal of 30 March 1977 SINITSIN, S.Ia. Issue No. 124 RECORD OF CONVERSATION with the member of the Permanent Committee of the PMAC Major BERHANU BAYEH 18 March 1977 This evening I visited Berhanu Bayeh in the office of the PMAC at his request. Referring to an instruction of the leadership of the PMAC, he informed me for transmission to Moscow of the following.

1. The meeting in Aden which took place March 16 between Mengistu Haile Mariam and Siad Barre, with the participation of [Cuban President] Fidel Castro and [People's Democratic Republic of Yemen President] Rubayi [Ali], ended without result in view of the position which Siad Barre took at the meeting. As Berhanu Bayeh said, the President of the SDR in arrogant terms expressed Somalia's territorial claims against Ethiopia, called Ethiopia a "colonial power," and declared that Somalia will continue its current policy in relation to Ethiopia, "while all Somalians have not received freedom." Siad Barre displayed disrespect to Mengistu Haile Mariam, crudely saying that that he allegedly is carrying out the same policy as had Haile Selassie. The Somali leader also declared that if Ethiopia considers itself a socialist state, then it must rapidly transfer the Ogaden to the SDR. As the basis of a settlement of the Ethiopian-Somali disagreement, Siad Barre suggested the creation of a confederation of the two countries on an "ethnic basis," i.e., with the preliminary transfer by Ethiopia of the Ogaden to Somalia's benefit. This proposal was rejected not only by Mengistu Haile Mariam, but Fidel Castro and Rubayi also expressed themselves against such an approach, which served as grounds for disrespectful statements to them by Siad Barre. In the words of Berhanu Bayeh, in the course of the meeting Siad Barre declared that if the socialist countries want to split with Somalia, that is their affair: the Somalian people carried out its revolution without outside help and "if the socialist countries will not help the Somalis, then reactionary countries can help them." At the meeting Mengistu Haile Mariam stressed the necessity of a consolidation of progressive forces in this region so as to oppose jointly the maneuvers of reaction and imperialism. In this regard, he underlined that no genuine revolution can successfully develop without the support of other progressive, especially socialist, states. Despite such results of the meeting, Berhanu Bayeh said, the Ethiopian leadership believes that the meeting brought an indisputable diplomatic success to Ethiopia, insofar as it visibly and in the presence of the leaders of Cuba and the PDRY revealed the true position of Somalia not only towards Ethiopia, but also in regard to the general tasks of the struggle with imperialism and reaction. In the opinion of Berhanu Bayeh, which, he said, is expressed also by the Cuban comrades, Siad Barre had taken such an uncompromising position at the meeting with Mengistu Haile Mariam, that he apparently had previously secured promises of support from reactionary Arab states.

2. In the evaluation of the leadership of the PMAC, Berhanu Bayeh continued, in light of the results of the Aden meeting it is possible to assume a sharp activation of anti-Ethiopia activity by Somalia in close cooperation with reactionary Arab states. According to information which the PMAC received from Mogadishu, the President of Sudan [Ja'afar Mohammed al-Nimeiry] should arrive in Somalia in a few days. In this regard the PMAC pointed to a report in the Egyptian newspaper "Al Ahram" to the effect that in current conditions the possibility is created that Somalia will join the political command of Sudan, Egypt, and Syria. It is also well known, said Berhanu Bayeh, that Saudi Arabia is continuing to seek an end to Somalia's cooperation with the Soviet Union, including in the military area, promising in exchange to provide Somalia with the necessary assistance. The leadership of the PMAC also is on guard about the intensified infiltration in the Ogaden by Somali armed groups, which moreover now include regular Somali troops disguised in civilian dress, armed with modern weapons. This, observed Berhanu Bayeh, has determined the extremely stubborn nature of recent armed conflict in the regions of Harar and Jijiga, as a result of which the Somalis managed to put out of action several armored vehicles of the Ethiopian Army. On 17 March, a Somali Air Force MiG fighter plane completed a provocative flight over Ethiopian territory in the region of Jijiga. In light of all this, Berhanu Bayeh requested that a PMAC request be sent to the Soviet government to take all possible measures to restrain Somalia from anti-Ethiopia actions. The PMAC does not exclude the possibility that Somalia at the present time may be preparing a serious armed provocation against Ethiopia, and therefore would be grateful for any information about that which it could receive from the Soviet side. From my own side I

pointed out to Berhanu Bayeh the need in this situation for Ethiopia to display fortitude. Further, I underlined the principled line of the Soviet Union of all-round support for the Ethiopian revolution and our diplomatic steps in this regard which were taken recently in states which border on Ethiopia. Berhanu Bayeh said that Ethiopia does not intend to aggravate its relations with Somalia or to toughen its own position. With satisfaction he noted the support of the Soviet Union for the Ethiopian revolution, particularly underlining the significance of the early deliveries of Soviet arms. In the words of Berhanu Bayeh, at the present time the PMAC is confronted with the critical issue of the uninterrupted supply to the Ethiopian Army of ammunition and spare parts for weapons which it possesses. The Americans are procrastinating on previously-agreed deliveries, and also deliveries of weapons on a commercial basis, referring in this regard to a required review of certain contracts in view of an increase in prices for these or some other types of weapons. The leadership of the PMAC, as in the past, is counting on the Soviet Union to provide Ethiopia with the necessary varied military assistance, but it understands that time will be required to master Soviet military equipment. Therefore, the PMAC is now urgently seeking out the possibility of receiving weapons, ammunition, and spare parts of American manufacture, insofar as the Ethiopian Army for now is armed by the USA. To this end, said Berhanu Bayeh, the PMAC in the coming days will send its own delegation to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which has at its disposal significant reserves of American trophy weapons. In this regard Berhanu Bayeh in the name of the PMAC leadership expressed a wish that the Soviet side will convince the Vietnamese comrades to provide, according to their capabilities, the necessary assistance in American arms, either on a grant basis or on a combined grant and commercial basis. In this regard he noted that in contrast to the past the PMAC intends to consider this issue with the Vietnamese directly, rather than running to the PRC for mediation. For my part, I promised to send through channels the wishes and requests which had been expressed by Berhanu Bayeh. At the end of the conversation Berhanu Bayeh made a personal request that his brother Abraham Bayeh (19 years old) be accepted into one of the educational institutions of the Soviet Union. Counter-revolutionaries, including among the student population, threaten his brother with reprisal for familial relations with the "fascist junta," because of which Abraham cannot go to school and must hide at another brother's house (Fisseha Bayeh, jurist). In these circumstances it would be desirable if Abraham Bayeh could be sent to the USSR as soon as possible. The level of his education -- 12th (graduating) grade of high school[;] however, because he currently is not able to attend classes (he studies at home with a teacher) and take the examinations, he evidently will not manage to receive an official certificate for finishing high school (he studies in the Wingate school, where until recently instruction was led by teachers from England). I told Berhanu Bayeh that I would bring his wish and thoughts regarding his brother to the attention of the Soviet ambassador. On a personal plane, I noted that resolving that issue would require consultation with the appropriate Soviet agencies. MINISTER-COUNSELOR OF THE USSR EMBASSY IN ETHIOPIA /S. SINITSYN/[Source: TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1638, ll. 93-97; translated by Mark H. Doctoroff.]"