

July 20, 1978

**Report on Mengistu's Visit to the Soviet Union to
discuss Soviet-Ethiopian Relations**

Citation:

"Report on Mengistu's Visit to the Soviet Union to discuss Soviet-Ethiopian Relations",
July 20, 1978, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Translated for CWIHP by Daniel Rozas
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/121063>

Summary:

While in the Soviet Union, Haile Mariam Mengistu spoke with Leonid Brezhnev about the current revolutionary and economic situation in Ethiopia. The report addresses the Ethiopian desire to create a revolutionary party, as well as the conflict in Eritrea and relations with Somalia and Djibouti.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

□Confidential

□EN 20.7.78

The chairman of VVAS [Supreme Military Administrative Council], Haile Mariam Mengistu, arrived in the USSR for short-term medical treatment, which was followed by Soviet-Ethiopian talks.

L. I. Brezhnev, who at the time was outside Moscow, spoke with Mengistu by telephone, at which time he congratulated the Chairman of VVAS with the great victory of the Ethiopian revolution--the destruction of foreign interventionists. He emphasized the importance of focusing now on internal strengthening of the revolution in Ethiopia. Mengistu conveyed gratitude to L. I. Brezhnev for Soviet Union's comprehensive assistance to the Ethiopian revolution and expressed conviction of its complete victory with the support of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

In addition, there was a discussion between Mengistu and A. N. Kosygin, during the course of which Mengistu described the current phase of revolutionary development in Ethiopia, emphasizing that it has attained great successes and reached a level under which it is impossible to turn away from the chosen path. The military victory in Ogaden helped consolidate the progressive patriotic forces in the country. At the same time the Ethiopian leadership is faced with having to resolve many difficult and urgent issues.

One of such important issues is the establishment of a revolutionary party that would take upon itself the administration of the process of progressive transformation. Mengistu stated that work in this direction is moving forward, and right now the task is to unite the various existing revolutionary organizations. However, at the same time he also noted certain difficulties in this regard.

A pointed question is posed by the economic situation, to which the Ethiopian leadership could not devote the necessary attention in light of the need to focus on the struggle against internal and foreign reactionaries and repelling Somali aggression. At the present time, a key question in this regard is straightening out operations at the ports, where a huge amount of cargo has accumulated, and the reestablishment of communications that link the coastal area with the central regions, as well as rebuilding and improving agricultural production.

Speaking of economic difficulties, Mengistu stated that without the assistance of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries "Ethiopia will not hold out." In this regard, the Ethiopian leaders reminded of the Ethiopian government's request to member countries of the SEV [Council on Mutual Economic Assistance] to render coordinated economic and technical assistance to Ethiopia.

Touching upon the question of Eritrea, Mengistu made it understood that with the current conditions it must be regarded not as an ethnic but as a class problem. The movement in Eritrea has transformed and is now increasingly becoming a weapon of reactionary and imperialist forces. Thus, in this matter, the Ethiopian leadership hopes for comprehensive support from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

During the course of the talks, Mengistu did not focus attention on the Somali-Ethiopian conflict. He noted that the people of Ethiopia and Somalia are in many ways close to each other, and in essence these are brother nations. Ethiopia does not have any territorial claims on neighboring countries. The Chairman of the VVAS emphasized that prospects for establishing friendly relations between Ethiopia and Somalia still exist, but for this to happen Somalia must renounce its expansionist aspirations. He pointed out that Ethiopia does not trust the current Somali leadership.

VVAS, judging from the words of Mengistu, realizes the importance of establishing peace in the Horn of Africa as a necessary precondition for a successful resolution of the problems facing the Ethiopian revolution. In Mengistu's opinion, one must not turn away from the efforts to return Somalia to a progressive position, in spite of increasing attempts by imperialists and Arab reactionaries to turn it into a weapon for carrying out their agenda.

Stating that Ethiopia supports the independence of Djibouti, Mengistu expressed apprehension that the economic difficulties facing that country may be used by imperialist and reactionary circles to turn it into a weapon for imposing their policy in the Red Sea region. Accordingly, the Ethiopian leadership is in favor of helping the revolutionary forces in Djibouti.

During the talks, meetings and discussions with Soviet representatives, the Ethiopian leaders expressed a strong commitment to steadfastly carry out a course in developing friendship and multi-faceted cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. They emphasized that this line is not dictated by opportunist ambitions, but is a result of the common goals and tasks shared by revolutionary Ethiopia and the socialist community.

On our part, we reaffirmed our unwavering policy to render comprehensive assistance and support to the Ethiopian revolution. We stated that we are prepared to continue rendering assistance to the VVAS leadership in creating an avant-garde party in Ethiopia, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. The establishment of such a party would signify a great victory for the Ethiopian revolution. However, this matter must be approached without unnecessary haste, so that the truly progressive elements in the party can be united.

We expressed readiness to render possible assistance to surmount the current economic difficulties in Ethiopia, particularly in straightening out operations in the ports. During the visit, an agreement was reached on further expansion of Soviet-Ethiopian cooperation in economic, technical, as well as military areas.

During discussions with the Chairman of VVAS, we devoted significant attention to the importance of a political settlement to the Eritrean problem, for which the Ethiopian leadership must draft a clear program for resolving the national question, including in Eritrea, in order to bring progressive elements to their side. We pointed out the danger of employing only military methods in resolving this difficult problem. One must not also fail to take into account that the situation in Eritrea worries many countries, including progressive Arab states.

On our part, we emphasized the importance of seeking ways to accelerate the reestablishment of peace in the Horn of Africa and the settlement of the Somali-Ethiopian conflict--on principled foundations, of course. We expressed the opinion that one of the conditions for creating a favorable international situation for Ethiopia is its implementation of an active, peaceful policy, as well as adherence to the promise not to move beyond its own borders while carrying out military operations.

We expressed to Mengistu the opinion that it is of course necessary to continue the struggle for Somalia, even though [Mohammed] Siad [Barre]'s statements do not bring out trust in us either, while his actions, especially the flirtation with the USA and the Arab reactionaries, testify to his insincerity.

Regarding Djibouti, we said that an independent, self-sufficient existence of this country is an important factor in the stability of the Horn of Africa. Bearing in mind that Mengistu's statements reflect the Ethiopian leadership's desire to increase its influence in Djibouti, we turned attention to the importance of using extreme caution in those questions that concern the internal situation of that country.

We gathered the impression that Mengistu himself understands the importance of a realistic approach toward both the Eritrean problem and toward relations with Somalia and Djibouti. However, it seemed that his circle includes persons who hold differing views, which Mengistu is clearly forced to take into consideration.

Overall, in our opinion, the talks with Mengistu were entirely useful and helped strengthen him in the positions of close cooperation with the countries in the socialist community. Information arriving from Addis Ababa testifies to the fact that Mengistu's visit to the Soviet Union and his talks with the Soviet leadership helped strengthen his authority and influence among broad sections of the Ethiopian population, as well as within the Ethiopian leadership.

The talks also confirmed the correctness of the policy to render further support to the regime in Ethiopia--a key country in the Horn of Africa. At the same time, the meetings and discussions in Moscow demonstrated the importance of continuing explanatory work with the Ethiopian leadership and with Mengistu personally on the

most important questions of VVAS domestic and foreign policy.