

March 3, 1978

**Memorandum of Conversation of SED Comrade
Lamberz with Cuban Ambassador to Ethiopia,
Comrade Pepe, Addis Ababa**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation of SED Comrade Lamberz with Cuban Ambassador to Ethiopia, Comrade Pepe, Addis Ababa", March 3, 1978, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and translated by Christian F. Ostermann. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/110973>

Summary:

The conversation focuses on outside support of the situation in the Horn of Africa. Specifically Soviet, Cuban, and US support for the various countries and groups

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum of Conversation of SED Comrade Lamberz with Cuban Ambassador to Ethiopia, Comrade Pepe, Addis Ababa, 3 March 1978 (dated 4 March 1978) (Based on notes of Comrade General Major Jaenicke.) [Introductory remarks] Comrade Pepe's estimate of the situation. There is a good development in the East. There are still Somali troops in the area of Jijiga, Dire Dawa, and Harar have been liberated. Currently [there is] a concentration on the Ethiopian side against Jijiga. Regular Somali troops are withdrawing to the border; [they] intend to leave guerrilla fighters in Jijiga as a bridgehead. The problem of the Ethiopian troops not taking any prisoners was discussed with Mengistu; it was Mengistu's concept to take prisoners but it had not yet achieved complete awareness among the troops. A train route was opened in the East, inhabitants return [to their homes]. The Issar and Afars were displaying good behavior; Issar in part fought on the side of the Ethiopians. On the trip of the envoy [U.S. deputy national security advisor David Aaron] of USA President Carter to Addis Ababa: The American desire to keep the trip secret was not accepted. The USA was concerned that Ethiopia would break off diplomatic relations. The USA would be ready to respect the revolutionary development in Ethiopia and grant aid to Ethiopia if its neutrality was guaranteed. They would perhaps be willing to deliver money and spare parts. Problems in the Ethiopia-USA relationship were not the fault of the Carter Administration but of its predecessor (for example non-compliance with weapons and material deliveries). The United States' main concern was the Soviet and Cuban presence. The United States would not support Somalia as long as Ethiopia was operating on its own territory. Mengistu explained to the USA envoy: It was his right to ask for advisers to come to Ethiopia, and they would stay as long as necessary. The Carter administration was to blame for the strained Ethiopian-USA relationship (role of the CIA etc.). He emphasized the neutrality of Ethiopia which would develop toward socialism. He would not be ready to switch allies. Mengistu's response was so good that the USA envoy immediately withdrew the demand for the immediate removal of Soviet and Cuban advisers; he demanded the withdrawal of the Cubans after the end of the Somali aggression; then the withdrawal would be necessary since otherwise this would result in a threat to USA strategic interests. The United States attempts to get an economic foothold in Ethiopia. Possibly deliveries of arms, equipment etc. would follow to "further confuse the situation." Comrade Pepe pointed to the fact that after the situation in the East would clear up some forces could try to perform an change of course in Ethiopia. (Something similar to [pro-Soviet and anti-American MPLA faction leader Nito] Alves in Angola.) At the request of the Cuban comrades, Mengistu spoke publicly about the presence of Soviet and Cuban advisers. Nevertheless, the press continually claims that Ethiopia is still fighting by itself. The reason for this [is] unclear. With respect to the "Red terror," Comrade Vivo mentioned this to Mengistu. Now there is a certain positive change. There is talk of "revolutionary legality." [Mengistu and MEISON] With regard to Eritrea it was attempted to convince Mengistu that a program for Eritrea had to be worked out. It would be necessary to create foundations and goals for which one could fight in Eritrea in order to be able to influence the lines of division among the various [Eritrean liberation] movements. Mengistu is not very convinced in this question. He fears other split-offs which would result in the destruction of the Ethiopian state. Mengistu has little confidence in the talks with the Eritreans. Cuban comrades have doubts as well. Nevertheless the talks begun by the SED were very important. Perhaps they would create pre-conditions for a necessary program. Territorial integrity and central authority had to be guaranteed. Danger of an internationalization of the conflict existed in the North, in particular in Massawa. There are doubts about the Aforki's role. If Massawa finally falls, one could expect that USA ships would show up in the port and Soviet ships would have to leave. The enemy's main blow can be expected in the North. Mengistu's attitude makes it easier for the enemy. Mengistu should not be confronted with the possibility of Eritrean independence. One has to pay attention to ensure that the Eritrean problem will not lead to a worsening of relations with the Socialist countries. Comrade Raul Castro has made it clear to Mengistu that the Cubans would not participate in the fights in the North. Even in case of an internationalization of the conflict Cuban troops could not intervene, given the lack of any program. [Concluding remarks] [Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and translated by Christian F. Ostermann.]