

July 1988

'Information About the Highlights of a Brief Working Visit to the USSR (25-27 July This Year [1988]) of the General Secretary of the WPE CC, the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam'

Citation:

"'Information About the Highlights of a Brief Working Visit to the USSR (25-27 July This Year [1988]) of the General Secretary of the WPE CC, the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam'", July 1988, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár [Budapest], XIX-J-1-j, Etiópia, 1988, 38d, levéltári szám: 41 - 13. Obtained and translated by Radoslav Yordanov.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/134785>

Summary:

Soviet authorities inform their Hungarian allies of the outcome of Mengistu's August 1988 visit to Moscow. Mengistu has ignored Soviet pleas to find a peaceful solution to the Eritrean conflict.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Information about the highlights of a brief working visit to the USSR (25-27 July this year [1988]) of the General Secretary of the WPE CC, the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam

The visit was carried out at the request of the Ethiopian side.

Informing the Soviet leaders about the situation in the country, Mengistu said that the Ethiopian Revolution is once again going through a difficult and responsible stage. The strengthening of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia and the formation of the political system of the people's democratic republic have caused fierce resistance from the internal and the external reaction. Taking advantage of the objective difficulties associated with the most severe drought and famine and some errors committed by the Ethiopian leadership in the previous period, the counterrevolutionary forces went on the offensive to prevent the advancement of the revolution. They have launched propaganda war against the progressive regime in Ethiopia, trying to set up the masses against the party and the leadership of the country, discredit its policies, split the unity of Ethiopia, kindle nationalistic sentiments in the outlying areas [and] thwart the plans of socio-economic development.

Mengistu highlighted the danger that has arisen as a result of the intensification of hostilities in the north of the country by the Eritrean separatists seeking to prevent the adoption of new legislation on autonomous regions. In March of this year, separatists managed to inflict a serious defeat on government troops, attempting to seize a number of strategically important cities in order to proclaim Eritrean independence. The advancement of separatists' armed formations was halted only through the urgent mobilization of forces and resources, an additional call to the army reservists and the help of friends.

Mengistu expressed his deep appreciation for the Soviet Union and the other fraternal socialist countries for their timely assistance, which allowed for the defense of Ethiopia's unity and its territorial integrity.

The situation in the north of Ethiopia remains difficult and, as the Ethiopian leader stressed, Ethiopia needs peace as never before. He did not rule out that a protracted war will have to be waged against the separatists, which will require the mobilization of all available resources in the country.

On our side, it was emphasized that the Ethiopian revolution, as before, can count on Soviet Union's support and solidarity. We feel the fate of Ethiopia and the historical choice of its people is close to us, and we not only sympathize with the progressive course conducted by its leadership, but also strive to provide it with all possible assistance. The difficult situation in which the Ethiopian leadership has to operate has been acknowledged, and it was noted that the reactionary forces apply similar subversive methods against such progressive African countries as Mozambique or Angola.

In this connection, we maintained that in the current national-democratic stage of the Ethiopian revolution, which will probably be sustained over time, it is especially important to maintain the internal stability of the society, to keep the revolutionary gains, to strengthen the people's power, to create conditions for further progress along the path of progressive reforms using the full range of economic, political and other measures. Of course, actions to this end require to account for the capabilities of the Ethiopian revolution, defined by historical reality.

On the example of our experience, including post-revolutionary years, we noted that in the current Ethiopian situation, more than ever before, the party is called upon in order to play the role of the political vanguard of society. We showed the need to

attract broad societal layers, especially the peasantry, on the side of the revolution. [We noted] the feasibility of using a flexible economic policy, a reasonable combination of public, cooperative and private sectors in the economy.

We thought persistently that in preserving the territorial integrity and unity of Ethiopia, it is important to demonstrate a proactive approach in finding a peaceful solution to the Eritrean problem [and] to turn to the Eritrean organizations with proposals to begin peace talks. If they refused, they would expose themselves, and the central government, in any case, would show its strength, not weakness.

We expressed to Mengistu our wish for him to work towards ensuring that a compromise on the basis of a political solution - a kind of common denominator - is found in the interest of the Ethiopian people, including the part of the Eritrean population, which goes after the separatists. While supporting Mengistu's idea about the need to have a strong army, which could have a proper impact on the separatists, we, at the same time, pointed out that its strengthening should be implemented by improving combat skills and raising the moral and the political spirit of the troops, and not through the quantitative build-up of personnel and armaments. Such an approach would not burden the country and the people of excessive military expenditures.

Mengistu pointed out the complexity of the situation in the Horn of Africa, said with regret that the Eritrean separatists are supported by Sudan and Somalia. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian leadership, he said, is firmly on the positions of dialogue and normalization of relations with neighboring countries.

For our part, we overwhelmingly supported this approach, corresponding to the general trend towards the political settlement of regional conflicts, and advised the Ethiopian friends to actively promote peace initiatives to normalize the situation in the Horn of Africa. We expressed our willingness to provide diplomatic assistance for their work in this direction.

We also recommend to Mengistu to consider how to activate Addis Ababa's policy towards the West, even more so that no Western country calls into question Ethiopia's territorial integrity.

Discussed were questions of improving Soviet-Ethiopian economic relations, taking into account the real possibilities of the two countries and from the perspective of the search for new, more efficient forms with clearly defined priorities. We were in favor of intensifying cooperation in such promising areas such as the establishment of joint ventures, as well as facilities on a reimbursable basis.

In view of the current situation in the country, Mengistu outlined Ethiopia's request for new loans to meet military and economic objectives as well as to postpone the repayment of previously granted Soviet loans. On our side, we promised to consider the requests. It was stressed that the creation of facilities on a reimbursable basis would increase the possibility for the Ethiopian side to repay existing debt.

During the course of the talk, it was felt that he still favors the military methods in solving the Eritrean problems, and does not exclude the possibility of returning to the policy of exerting pressure on Somalia and Sudan. In this context, we have tried to bring to Mengistu's mind the idea about

the need to display restraint and flexibility and about the responsibility of the Ethiopian leadership to develop and adopt fundamentally important decisions for the fate of the revolution. Probably, there is still a lot of work to be done with Mengistu.

In general, the meetings and the conversations with Mengistu in Moscow were, in our opinion, useful, allowed a really friendly, businesslike exchange of views on the situation in and around Ethiopia at this critical stage of its development. We have clearly shown to the Ethiopian leadership that the Soviet Union will continue its readiness to build relations with NDRE on the principles of friendship and solidarity.