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ABOUT THE SOMALIA-ETHIOPIA CONFLICT (Information Sheet)

Since the time of the formation of an independent Somalian state in 1960, there has been tension in inter-state relations on the Horn of Africa. Its source is the aspiration of the leadership of Somalia to unite the lands populated by Somali tribes in a single state and the claims it has made in that regard to certain regions of Ethiopia (Ogaden), Kenya, and the territory of the Republic of Djibouti.

Relations are particularly sharp between Somalia and Ethiopia. On multiple occasions border incidents and military conflict have broken out between them.

The revolution in Ethiopia in 1974 did not lead to an improvement in Somalia-Ethiopia relations. More to the point, President Siad and other Somali leaders, using as a cover demagogic declarations about the right of nations to self-determination, right up to secession, have intensified their pressure on Ethiopia. The Somalis in essence have demanded the partition of the multi-national Ethiopian state on the basis of ethnicity. These demands were obviously aimed against the interests of the Ethiopian revolution and poured grist on the mill of internal and external reaction.

In these conditions the USSR and other socialist states undertook efforts to normalize relations between Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Somalia (SDR). In March 1977, at the initiative of Fidel Castro with the participation of the chairman of the Presidential Council of the PDRY S. Rubayi Ali, a meeting took place in Aden between the Chairman of the PMAC Mengistu Haile Mariam and the President of the SDR Siad, which due to the unconstructive position of the latter ended without result.

The Soviet Union more than once appealed to the leadership of Somalia and Ethiopia with a call to normalize their relations and proposed a constructive program which would lead to a settlement, and indicated its readiness to make available its good offices. In July-August 1977, in the course of separate meetings with representative of Somalia and Ethiopia who were visiting Moscow, it was found that the sides were occupying mutually-exclusive positions; moreover the Somalis were continuing to insist on wresting the Ogaden away from Ethiopia.

Insofar as plans to obtain the Ogaden without the application of force did not come to fruition, the Somali leadership, in which chauvinistic moods came to dominate, set about the practical realization of its expansionist plans, counting on achieving success in relation to the domestic political situation in Ethiopia, which was aggravated at that time. The Arab reaction also pushed them to this, and also imperialist states, in particular the USA, which, according to Siad's own admission, had promised to provide military assistance to Somalia.

On 23 July 1977, Somalia unleashed on the African Horn an armed conflict. Under cover of the Front for the Liberation of Western Somalia (FLWS)--which had been created by the Somali leadership itself--it sent its own forces into the Ogaden, and they occupied a significant part of the Ethiopian provinces of Harar, Bale, and Sidamo, and only through the bitter fights which unfolded in October-December 1977 were they stopped at the approaches to the important centers of Harar and Dire Dawa.

After appropriate preparation, the Ethiopian armed forces went on the counter-attack in February of this year. In the beginning of March of this year the strategically important city of Jijiga was liberated, and a major grouping of Somali forces was shattered. Cuban military personnel took part in the military actions, while Soviet military advisors participated in working out the plan of military operations. To the present, the liberation of all territory has in fact been completed, and Ethiopian troops have reached the border with Somalia. When the Somalis were on the edge of a military catastrophe, the leadership of the SDR made the decision to withdraw its forces from the Ogaden front. At the same time the representatives of the FLWS announced that they would not stop military actions on the territory of the Ogaden.

Confronted with the decisive refusal of the Soviet Union and the other countries of the socialist commonwealth to support the territorial claims on Ethiopia, the Somali leadership on 13 November 1977 unilaterally announced the annulment of the 1974 Soviet-Somali Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and demanded the recall from Somalia of all Soviet military and civilian advisors. In Somalia an anti-Soviet campaign was unfolded. Diplomatic relations with Cuba were cut off.

At the same time the Somali leadership began actively to search for support from Muslim states, winning from them assistance which included arms deliveries and the sending of forces for participation in combat actions against Ethiopia under the banner of "Islamic Solidarity." The visit of the President of Somalia, Said Barre, to Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Oman, and also Iraq and Syria, at the end of December 1977-beginning of January 1978, served just such goals.

As the conflict went on, the Somali leaders many times called out to the USA and other Western powers with persistent appeals to provide assistance to Somalia and to interfere in events on the African Horn aimed at a "peace" settlement to the conflict and the "defense" of Somalia from aggression which allegedly was being prepared against it from the direction of Ethiopia.

Following the collapse of its adventure in Ogaden, Somalia has not retracted its territorial claims against Ethiopia, and putting forth various conditions it continues to seek these same goals by other means. The Somali leadership called on the great powers with an appeal to secure recognition and the realization of self-determination for the population of the Ogaden. In this regard it called on the great powers to undertake urgent measure to settle the conflict through negotiations, and by securing the withdrawal of "all foreign forces" from the African Horn, having in mind the Cuban military personnel and Soviet military advisors which had been invited by the Ethiopian government as a means to strengthen the defense capability of the country. Somalia also spoke out for sending "neutral forces" to the Ogaden.

The Ethiopian leadership evaluated the actions of Somalia as an act of armed aggression and in relation to this on 8 September 1977 broke off diplomatic relations with the SDR.

During the armed conflict, the PMAC expressed readiness to settle the conflict peacefully within the framework of the OAU, putting forth as an absolute condition the beginning of negotiations with the Somalis on the withdrawal of their forces from Ethiopian territory. Simultaneously the Ethiopian leaders declared many times in public speeches that Ethiopia did not intend, after the liberation of the Ogaden territory, to carry military actions beyond the limits of their own borders.

After the destruction of the Somali troops, the Ethiopia MFA asserted in its declaration on 12 March of this year the aspiration of the Ethiopian government to establish peace and stability on the African Horn in accord with the Charters and decisions of the U.N. and the OAU, on the basis of observation of the principles of non-use of force as a means of solving international arguments, and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. In the declaration it was further pointed out that the establishment of peace on the African Horn is possible only in the event of Somali retraction of its claims for part of the territory of Ethiopia and Kenya, and also Djibouti, [and] observation by it of international agreements. In it are rejected the attempts of the USA government and its allies to tie the withdrawal of Somali forces to a resolution of issues which fall under the sovereignty of Ethiopia (the presence on its territory of foreign military personnel invited there by the Ethiopian government, the proposal to send foreign observers to the Ogaden).

Regarding Somalia's demand that the population of the Ogaden be presented with the right of self-determination, the Ethiopian leadership declares that a resolution of that issue is a domestic affair of Ethiopia and that therefore it cannot be a condition for a settlement of the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict. The Ethiopian side also raises the issue of compensation from Somalia for the losses caused by the military actions in the Ogaden.

Somalia's position in the conflict with Ethiopia does not meet, as a rule, with support from the members of the OAU, who support the preservation of existing state borders in Africa.

The special committee of the OAU for settlement of Somalia-Ethiopia relations (under the chairmanship of Nigeria), which met in session in Libreville [Gabon] in August 1977, refused to accept the Front for the Liberation of Western Somalia as a national-liberation movement, [and] called on the governments of both countries to stop hostile actions and to settle their disagreements by peaceful means, on the basis of the principle of the inviolability of the borders of African countries. In a resolution accepted by the the committee there was contained a call on everyone, particularly non-African countries, to refrain from interference in the conflict.

Efforts which have until now been undertaken by several African countries and the OAU to mediate an end to the conflict have not led to any positive results in view of the contradictory positions taken by the sides.

Over the course of the conflict, the reactionary Muslim regimes have taken a position in support of Somalia. However, according to information which we have, at the time of the conduct of military actions in the Ogaden, President Siad was not successful in getting their agreement to send their forces to that region, although Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt did covertly send arms to Somalia.

On the other hand, such Arab countries as the PDRY, Algeria, and, to an extent, Libya, provided support to Ethiopia. In this regard the PDRY sent weapons and military personnel to Ethiopia.

Over the course of the conflict, Sudan's position underwent change. For a variety of reasons it refused to take an extreme anti-Ethiopian course.

Leading Western countries, while verbally supporting a political settlement to the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict and stressing their own neutrality, in fact have tried to use the conflict to undermine the revolutionary regime in Ethiopia and to rout the progressive forces in Somalia, and also to weaken the presence of the USSR in that region of the world. In fact, the Westerners have conducted a policy of veiled assistance to Somalia. Nonetheless, for a variety of reasons they have not set out to provide Somalia with direct military assistance. Primarily they did not want to decisively push Ethiopia away from them, counting on reestablishing their positions here in the future. They also could not but take into account that the actions of Somalia had not met with support from African states, but [in fact] Kenya, which has tight contacts with the West, sharply condemned them.

At the present time, from the side of the Westerners, particularly the USA, efforts are being undertaken to take into their own hands the initiative for a settlement of the conflict in the interests of strengthening their own positions on the African Horn. Under conditions of the occupation of the Ogaden by Somali forces they put forth proposals for a quick beginning to negotiations, so that the Somali side could speak at them from a position of strength. Another of their ideas which they put forth was to pass consideration of the issue of the conflict to the UN Security Council, where the Westerners counted on putting pressure on Ethiopia.

The decision of the SDR to withdraw Somali forces from the Ogaden was quickly used by the USA leadership for a declaration about the need for the quick withdrawal from Ethiopia of Soviet and Cuban military personnel. The Western powers also spoke in favor of the idea of sending to the Ogaden foreign "neutral observers" to supervise the withdrawal of troops from that regions and to ensure the security of its population.

The Chinese leadership has expressed itself from an anti-Soviet position in relation to the conflict, trying to heap all the responsibility for the ongoing events on the Soviet Union. While not openly expressing its attitude to the conflict, at the same time it has essentially supported the position of Somalia. There is information that the PRC has delivered small arms to Somalia.

The countries of the socialist commonwealth have in relation to the conflict taken a position of censuring the aggressive actions of Somalia and providing Ethiopia with internationalist assistance and support.

Cuba acted particularly actively in this direction, sending, in response to a request from the government of Ethiopia and as officially announced by F. Castro on 16 March of this year, its own tank operators, artillery specialists, pilots, and also sub-units of mechanized infantry, to provide assistance to the armed forces of that country while the Ogaden was under conditions of occupation by Somali forces. During the Ethiopian counter-attack, Cuban soldiers were used in the main lines of attack. The Soviet Union and Cuba are in constant contact aimed at coordination of their actions in support of the Ethiopian revolution.

The attitude of the Soviet Union toward the Somali-Ethiopia conflict is determined by the fact that that conflict contradicts the interests of progressive forces in that region, and creates a danger of turning the African Horn into a hotbed of serious international tension.

After the outbreak of armed conflict on the African Horn, the Soviet Union came out in favor of its quick cessation, for the peaceful settlement of relations between Somalia and Ethiopia by means of negotiations on the basis of mutual respect by the sides of sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs, noting that an absolute condition of such a settlement must be a cessation of military actions and a quick and unconditional withdrawal of Somali forces from the territory of Ethiopia, and that otherwise a situation analogous to the one in the Middle East might arise on the African Horn.

Our principled line in relation to the situation on the Horn of Africa was precisely expressed in the speeches of comrades L.I. Brezhnev of 28 September 1977 on the occasion of the visit to the USSR of the President of the People's Republic of Angola A. Neto, and A.N. Kosygin of 12 January 1978 on the occasion of the visit to the USSR of the President of the APDR [Algerian People's Democratic Republic] H. Boumedienne, and also in the TASS Declaration of 18 January 1978.

The Soviet Union spoke out against efforts of the Western states to submit the issue of the situation on the African Horn for consideration by the UN Security Council, which they could use in particular to unleash a hostile campaign against the USSR and Cuba. At the same time the Soviet Union believes that the Organization of African Unity should continue its efforts to provide assistance on a settlement of the Somali-Ethiopia conflict, insofar as it has not exhausted its possibilities in this area.

The position of the Soviet Union towards the Somali-Ethiopia conflict has many times been brought to the attention of the leadership of progressive African and Arab states, and also to a range of Western powers.

The Soviet Union consistently follows a firm line in providing the utmost assistance and support to the revolutionary Ethiopian regime. During the conflict, supplementary, urgent measures were undertaken to strengthen the defense capability of Ethiopia, which had become a victim of aggression. We brought deliveries of combat materiel, weapons, and ammunition to Somalia to a halt. After the Somali side undertook unfriendly actions in November 1977, the Soviet Union stopped economic and trade cooperation and ended military cooperation with Somalia.

In the beginning of March of this year President Said appealed to the Soviet Union with a request to provide mediatory services to settle the Somali-Ethiopia conflict and expressed readiness to establish friendly relations between Somalia and the USSR.

From our side agreement was given to implement mediatory efforts if the leadership of Ethiopia would view that favorably and in the event that Somalia took a realistic position on a settlement of the conflict. In this regard Siad's attention was drawn to the fact that the various preconditions put forth by the Somali side (giving self-determination to the population of Ogaden) only delay the possibility of holding negotiations to bring an end to the conflict, insofar as they cannot be acceptable to any sovereign state and complicate the realization by us of mediatory efforts.

As far as the establishment of friendly relations with Somalia is concerned, from our side there was expressed readiness for that in principle and under the clear understanding of the fact that Somalia will take specific steps to establish a genuine peace on the African Horn.

In response to our information about Siad's proposal, the Ethiopian government, having expressed doubt about the sincerity of the intentions of the Somali leadership, at the same time expressed readiness to begin negotiations with Somalia in Moscow with the participation of the Soviet Union, on the condition that the Somali representatives are prepared to declare in due course the rejection of their anti-Ethiopian, anti-Soviet, and anti-Cuban positions; to declare respect for the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and to give agreement to the demarcation of the Ethiopia-Somalia border on the basis of existing international agreements; to stop their support of underground movements directed against the territorial integrity and unity of Ethiopia; and lastly, in some way or another to inform public opinion of their own country and world public opinion about Somalia's new position.

So far the Somali leadership rejects these proposals and continues to insist on its own conditions.

The outcome of the war in the Ogaden essentially was reflected in the domestic political situation of its participants. The situation in Somalia was sharply exacerbated. On the grounds of a worsening of the economic situation and a decline in the standard of living, dissatisfaction with the current leadership grew among various strata of the population, including the army. This dissatisfaction, which has assumed open forms, is being suppressed by Said with the help of executions and repressions. In Ethiopia the military victory facilitated, on the one hand, the consolidation of the patriotic, progressive forces, and the strengthening of the position of Mengistu and his supporters, and, on the other hand, enlivened nationalistic elements, including in the leadership of the country, which are putting forth the idea that the Somali threat should be "done away with" once and for all.

Overall, the situation on the African Horn remains complex and tense. The cessation of military actions on the ground has not yet been ratified in any way, and the continuing Somali claims to the Ogaden, and [to] part of the territory of Kenya and the Republic of Djibouti, create a situation fraught with the outbreak of a new armed confrontation. Such a situation creates an opportunity for maneuvers of imperialist and reactionary Arab circles in this region of Africa, and therefore the establishment there of

peace and the achievement of an agreement between Somalia and Ethiopia on stopping the conflict corresponds to our interests.

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[Source: TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 75, d. 1175, ll. 13-23; translated by Mark Doctoroff.]