

was escorted to the boarder town of Galafi and handed over to Ethiopian military authorities.

### ■■■■ SOVIET HOLD AND CUBAN "WITHDRAWAL"

A sophisticated campaign of misinformation, master-minded from Addis Ababa, has long been underway to suggest that the Megistu dictatorship could be weaned away from its reliance on the Soviet Union. Over the years, and despite an everincreasing hold of the Soviets and their allies, this campaign enjoyed a surprising degree of complaisance from western governments and voluntary agencies. It reached new heights in recent months when news concerning the "withdrawal" of Cuban troops started to make headlines in the western press. In early February, a few weeks after the expulsion of American diplomats from Addis Ababa, ridiculous but no less orchestrated "leaks" even went as far as suggesting that two Soviet diplomats were expelled from the country on charges of "spying" for the KGB.

For some time now, insignificant "nationalist" gestures well calculated to confuse international public opinion have been taken as proof of the "ambiguous" nature of the regime's relations with the Soviet block. But for us Ethiopian patriots, there is nothing ambiguous in the regime's attitude. The crippled economy has driven the dictatorship to seek to improve its relations with the West in order to attract more economic and humanitarian aid and strange as it may seem to obtain the hard currency it needs to pay for Soviet arms deliveries. And this cannot be taken as a show of resistance to Soviet domination.

The fact of the matter is that foreign military and political hold on our country is growing ever tighter and Ethiopia is fast turning into the closest Soviet ally in Africa.

The country has accounted for more than half of all military sales by the Soviet Union to sub-sahara Africa

since 1977. During the past three years Moscow shipped an average of 25,000 tons of sophisticated arms worth about one billion US dollars a year. There are 1700 Soviet military advisors who are particularly active in Eritrea, Hararge, Tigray, Bale and Sidamo where the regime's forces are engaged in counterinsurgency operations against the national liberation movements. The Dalhake archipelago, off the Red Sea coast, where the Soviets enjoy exclusive rights, has now become the primary source of logistics and maintenance support for the Indian Ocean squadron of the Soviet navy. As they have become more entrenched over the past year, ships of the Soviet Mediterranean fleet have also been calling at Dalhak for maintenance and repairs. In addition, the Soviets have recently begun to improve the island's defenses with anti-aircraft weapons and a contingent of their naval infantry.

Politically, the long-awaited "Workers' Party of Ethiopia" has just been set up on strict Soviet lines. The creation of this party will not only tighten the Soviet hold on Ethiopia but will also aggravate the puppet regime's destabilizing role in the region. As a certain Rashidovich Rashidov, alternate member of the politburo of the CPSU put it, such a party would occupy "a special place not only in Ethiopia, but also in the continent of Africa." The presence of G. Romanov at the party formation congress in Addis Ababa cannot but underscore the importance attached by Moscow to its "alliance" with Ethiopia.

What then is the significance of the Cuban "withdrawal" from a country which for all practical purposes is the closest Soviet ally in the African continent?

The Cubans do not participate directly in operations in Tigray and Eritrea. As for the Ogaden, there has been no military need for them since 1979. Now it is the regime's army and so-called "Somali Liberation" forces trained and armed by Ethiopia and Libya who are crossing the frontier

into that country. Mengistu feels that these troops, who are costing more than 72 million dollars a year to the country, can be more useful elsewhere. In fact the reason for the Cuban presence in Ethiopia has been from the outset, to maintain and consolidate the military regime. As early as 1978 a base was established at Debre Zeite, 50 kms. south of Addis Ababa, manned by a well equipped Cuban brigade ready to crush any coup attempt in the capital. Recent events there and specially the arrest of several hundred government officials, COPWE leaders and army officers accompanied by the first official admission for years that opponents of the government were operating in the capital prove beyond any doubt that the regime is taking the danger of a coup d'état seriously. That is why the "withdrawal" is not only restricted to the Ogaden but is also an operation intended to reinforce the Cuban brigade at Debre Zeite where some 4000 of the "withdrawn" troops are now stationed.

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