

The Mitrokhin Archives: Somali KGB Agents

“Operator” and “Rashid”

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Dec 04, 2011

The Soviet Union’s relationship with Somalia was one of the most complicated bilateral relationships that Somalia ever had. This bilateral relationship had begun in early the 1960s as an outcome of a reciprocal interest of Somalia and USSR. Somalia needed reliable support, cheap loans and accessible funds to build its defense force. USSR on the other hand needed a foothold in the Horn of Africa to counter the growing US influence in the Horn of African region.

In 1962, USSR signed an agreement with Somalia to help Somalia build modern national army and to provide economical loans to support Somalia’s development. From 1962 to 1969, the Soviet Union trained approximately 500 Somali military personal in different sectors of the army including but not limited to military officers, technical support teams, engineers and public health workforce among others. *(Total number would grow to more than 2500 by the end of 1977)*



In spite of its generous support however, the Soviet Union had little or no major impact on Somalia’s policy and the trajectory of Somalia’s future. It is believed that Somalia’s immature democratic system (1960-1969) didn’t allow the Soviets to have a major policy influence on Somalia.



Somalia was a member country of the non-aligned movement and friendly with most western countries (except Britain). This was to change; as a

superpower the Soviets planned to influence Somalia's policy and Somalia's future by any means it could – including the use of the tools of intelligence. The Soviets were paying attention to their strategic and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa

Soviet intelligence services were known to have infiltrated in many democratic developing countries. For instance India was a best known case for easy infiltration of Soviet Agents. Yet, in spite of young and corrupt democratic system in Somalia there exists no documentation of USSR infiltration in the Somali political establishment and political parties.

Instead, it seems the USSR intelligence agencies identified rather terrific opportunities to infiltrate Somalia's civil and military officials through the large Somali students and military personnel it trained. The Soviet Intelligence Services mainly the Комитет государственной безопасности (КГБ) commonly known as the KGB has recruited number of high ranking military officers and civilians. By late 1960s, the Soviet Union had indeed pursued and even succeeded to recruit high ranking Somali military officers in complete disregard to Somalia as a friendly state.



Somalia was aware of some recruitment activities because many of the targeted officers and civilians reported their ordeals (casually or officially). Yet it seemed that Somali governments of the 1960s were either incapable of dealing with the threat or were least alarmed about the immediate outcome of KGB infiltration in high ranking military officers. This inability or perhaps indifference to grasp the consequence of infiltration would eventually prove to be catastrophic for all future Somali governments.

In the 1960s Somali government's powers were decentralized, decision making was collective and in spite of the immature democratic practice in Somalia; there were an independent judiciary and distinct legislative and executive branches that governed the affairs of the young republic. In fact Somali courts dealt with some espionage activities against Somalia by British agents handing tough long sentences against these agents.

Somalia's calculation was that foreign agent cannot pose serious political problem and will be dealt with through the law of the land. Power was not consolidated; there were no single authority and as such any agent would have tough time succeeding in solo! - This assumption didn't hold in case of KGB and it would prove to be a fatal error!



The Mitrokhin Archives, revealed in 1992 by former KGB Agent Vasilli Mitrokhin (and later documented by British historian Christopher Andrew) show that a high ranking military officer and a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy was recruited and trained as an active KGB agent. This Agent was Codenamed "Operator". As documented by Mitrokhin and Andrews in 2005, the Archives show agent Operator is the late Salad Gaveire Kedie (1). Also documented is the fact that the USSR to have prior knowledge of Siad Barre's 1969 coup in Somalia. In fact the KGB has codenamed the coup as Operation KONKORD.

Salad Gaveire Kedie was known in the Somali Army as a capable and ambitious officer. While It is important to mention that KGB Agent Operator had become a member of the ruling Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and may or may not have had influence on policy making in Somalia. It is certainly beyond the aspiration of this short article to articulate any particular position or provide a complete analysis of the role of Salad Gaveire Kedie or for that matter any of the Somali KGB agents.



Scholars of Somali studies have in the past debated the role and the ideological positions of the members ruling Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC). The Mitrokhin Archives as documented by Christopher Andrews clearly show that Soviet leaders did not trust Siad Barre as a socialist leader and suspected him to mix Somali nationalism with socialism.

In addition, to Salad Gaveire Kedia, the KGB has also established contact with an ideological officer codenamed KERL. KERL though not an agent would prove to be an important influential contact with substantial policy influence. The archives do not explicitly identify the identity of KERL but mention that KERL visited the USSR and was also a member of the Supreme Revolutionary Council.

Among other recruits of the KGB were a prominent Somali journalist codenamed Agent RASHID. The role and the contributions of Agent Rashid was not documented by Mitrokhin and Andrew. RASHID's KGB communication was discontinued over his protests on the USSR stance in 1977 War.

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Reference:

1- Andrew, Christopher M., and Vasili Mitrokhin. 2005. *The world was going our way: the KGB and the battle for the Third World*. New York: Basic Books