

August 25, 1976
Telegram from Beijing to Bucharest, SECRET,
Urgent, No. 066.252

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Summary:

The Embassy of Romania in Beijing assess the Chinese response to the Panmunjeom or "Axe Murder" Incident of August 1976.

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To: Comrade Constantin Oancea

Regarding the Incident in Panmunjeom

1. Following the recent discussions with Chinese officials (Yu Zhan, Deputy Foreign Minister; Peng Xiaohui, Deputy Chief of Staff, and others), the following assessments regarding the incident in Panmunjeom came to light:

- The incident will not degenerate into a military conflict. A conflict on the Korean Peninsula, in case it breaks out, will not start with the parties involved in it announcing measures (similar to those announced recently by the United States, respectively by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), but it will be started impromptu.

- Our interlocutors said that the incident was a provocation of the United States of America, but they acknowledged that the North Korean comrades let themselves caught in this provocation. The incident, to their mind, did not bring any political benefits to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Militarily, the United States of America increased its presence in the area.

We would like to point out as significant the fact that the Chinese media did not award a great deal of space to the incident, limiting themselves to repeating the official declarations of the North Koreans, without offering their own commentaries and interpretations.

2. The diplomatic corps in Beijing broadly comments on the incident. Most diplomats we talked to (from socialist and non-aligned countries as well as from capitalist countries) think this was a mistake on behalf of the North Koreans, which would not bring them any political or diplomatic gains. The reserved tone of the Chinese propaganda apparatus is to be noticed, as it does not want to get engaged in an international campaign which may derail the course adopted by the People's Republic of China in its relations with the United States and with surrounding countries. The same sources believe that the USSR cannot get engaged in a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula either, for its own reasons.

Certain diplomats are not ruling out the hypothesis that the North Korean action was partly aimed at checking the reactions of China, the USSR and other friendly countries within the Non-Aligned Movement, and on the other hand, to prepare a condemnation of the United States at the forthcoming session of the United Nations.

We will continue to follow the reactions and commentaries [which emerge] on this incident.

Signed: Nicolae Gavrilescu