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Report on a Stay of a GDR Military Delegation in the DPRK in October 1976

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Summary:

Kim Il Sung and Heinz Hoffmann discuss the "axe murder" incident of 18 August, which Kim Il Sung interprets as a deliberate provocation by the Americans .

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[Undated October 1976]

GDR Defense Minister Heinz Hoffmann
to
General Secretary of the SED Central Committee and
Chairman of the GDR National Defense Council
Comrade Erich Honecker

R e p o r t
on a stay of a GDR Military Delegation in the DPRK in October 1976

According to your instructions, a GDR military delegation under my leadership stayed in the DPRK between 2nd and 7th of October 1976. They accepted an invitation by the Minister for People's Forces, Army General Oh Jin Wu who in 1968, then still Head of the Political Main Department of the Korean People's Army, visited the GDR as leader of a military delegation.

[. . .]

The Korean leadership is furthermore interested in demonstrating to our party leadership, and certainly to the Soviet leaders as well, that it will not initiate military actions against the South. It is willing to join the general course of détente pursued by the socialist states. Otherwise, I cannot understand why Oh Jin Wu, and again Kim Il Sung, addressed the incident of 18 August 1976 in detail and interpreted it as a U.S. provocation without North Korean contribution, indeed as directed against the DPRK's own political interest.

[. . .]

[Meeting with Kim Il Sung on 5 October 1976]
[According to Notes by Comrade Helga Picht]

Kim Il Sung:
How is your health, how do you like the climate? How is Comrade Erich Honecker doing? Is he healthy?

Heinz Hoffmann:
I am pleased to forward cordial greetings of Comrade Erich Honecker and want, also in his name, to repeat my thanks for inviting our military delegation. From time to time, the West German imperialists created some trouble for us, but everything is under control and thus, also, Comrade Honecker is doing well.

Kim Il Sung:
I am grateful that you accepted our invitation and want to welcome you again. Your visit will certainly contribute to further solidifying the friendship between our parties, peoples, states, and especially between our armies. I am glad to see you all in such healthy shape. Our Minister for People's Forces has certainly told you about the situation in our country so that in general you will be well informed.

As you have certainly heard, recently, there was an incident in our country in Panmunjeom. It is always difficult with such incidents to say whether it was a deliberate provocation or an inadvertent accident. However, we obviously ask ourselves what might have caused the adversary to think that, after 20 years, it suddenly has to cut down a certain tree in the Joint Security Area [of the DMZ].

Our soldiers are educated towards the hatred of American imperialism and they are overall well prepared politically and ideologically. What happened? On 18 August at 10:00 a.m. suddenly 7 Americans and 7 soldiers of the South Korean puppets appeared in the Joint Security Area and began to cut down a tree. This happened without previous notification, though it is required according to the agreements.

Four of our soldiers went there to let the enemy soldiers know about this violation of the agreements. There were the South Korean puppet soldiers working on the tree. We demanded that they stop, but the Americans ordered them to continue.

Suddenly one of the Americans threw an axe towards one of our soldiers and hit him in the face. The comrade next to him became very furious and threw the axe back. A fight ensued. During the course of events, some of our people were injured on the head and the throat and two Americans were killed.

From the other side, everything was photographed and even filmed. Since to us the incident came totally unexpected, we obviously did not do any documentation. Nevertheless, the enemies contend we provoked them and they alerted their troops in the Pacific area within two hours. Then, we also alerted our forces and created a state of combat readiness in the entire country - since we did not know if they would attack us right away.

We hold the opinion that this incident was a deliberate provocation by the other side for the following reasons:

□□□ This tree which bothered nobody for twenty years - why did it have to be trimmed just on August 18?

. The other side had made preparations to document the events and had cameras ready at hand.

. The numerical superiority of the enemies was deliberately pre-arranged.

. Just 2 hours after the incident they raised alarm in the entire Pacific area without investigating the events.

□□

In our opinion, this incident was supposed to create favorable conditions for Ford in the presidential elections. Furthermore it provided a pretext for Park Chung Hee to put the patriots on trial who had been arrested in spring for the distribution of the "Declaration for the Salvation of the Fatherland" in South Korea. The Americans put their most modern aircraft and aircraft carriers on alert and created a complicated situation for the world. Yet, I think we handled this problem properly. First, Kissinger demanded that we apologize and punish our soldiers. However, we have no reason to sanction our comrades since they just acted as good patriots.

Heinz Hoffmann:

To the contrary, you must commend them.

Kim Il Sung:

The Americans have staged this provocation in our country, and they struck first. It can always happen during a fight that somebody gets killed. We declared to the

Americans that we regret the incident, but we did not concede anything on reparations.

Then, the enemies ceased to raise further demands. They withdrew their aircraft and aircraft carriers. Only some airbases in Japan are still on alert.

We are sorry that this incident worried the socialist fraternal countries. But this is not our fault, since the Americans staged this provocation. Now everything has calmed down.

Ford staged this provocation for his re-election. The Americans staged provocations in our country all the time. It is same with every President. In 1968, Johnson staged the Pueblo affair, Nixon organized [in 1969] the incident with the spy plane EC-121, and now Ford in 1976 attempted in Panmunjeom to use a little tree to stir up the entire world. Now, they need to resort to such petty events to stir things up before the elections.

Now, the situation has calmed down. Obviously, we are monitoring the movements of the enemy but currently there are no major problems.

[. . .]

Obviously, the required combat readiness in the context of the Panmunjeom incident has slightly impaired our production on all levels. Like you [in the GDR], we have only a small country and accordingly also a small army. Therefore, we had to hold all workers in combat readiness for 14 days. They had to stay on guard and watch if there will be an attack by the enemies. However, now people are back to work and the harvest. [. . .]

Kim Il Sung:

[. . .]

I am glad that you had such positive impressions in our country and thank you for your friendly comments. You are defending the Western [outpost of socialism], we are defending the Eastern outpost of socialism. Therefore we have much in common. This is why exchanges and cooperation are good and favorable things. We can learn a lot from you. We know that if our armies are strong and disciplined then peace can be secured.

The character of imperialism has not changed and cannot be changed - if this would be the case, it would be no longer imperialism and the working class would hold power in its hand. The core and character of Leninism is to fight imperialism. Accordingly, we have to fight imperialism today. We are glad to have you as close comrades in arms. We are for unity of the socialist camp, and for the strengthening of the socialist camp. We will fight jointly until the imperialist system is an issue of the past, and we stick to the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism.

You noted that you will support the fight of our people for peaceful unification of the fatherland. We will also continue to support the struggle of your people. This is why it is so good to continue the exchange of delegations and share our opinions. I express my thanks to you.