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First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korean Reports on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966

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Summary:

A. Borunkov evaluates Sino-North Korean relations in 1966, focusing on the divergences between China and North Korea over the Vietnam War, interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, and the Cultural Revolution.

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Sino-Korean Relations in 1966 (memo)

Sino-Korean Relations have recently undergone some significant changes...

The period of close Sino-Korean rapprochement did not lead to the strengthening of the authority of the KWP in the international Communist movement. The Chinese government was not able to give significant aid to the DPRK in the international arena...

...The October (1964) CPSU CC plenum opened up prospects to the Korean leadership to restore friendly relations with the Soviet Union...

The restoration of ties between the DPRK and the Soviet Union...provoked dissatisfaction on the part of Peking. Attempts were made by the Chinese leaders to pressure the Korean leadership. This forced it to make changes to relations with China. They have become increasingly cooler during the last year and a half.

...

(Points of view of Sino-Korean relations[]). The report of Kim Il Sung at the KWP conference (October 1966) was characterized by displaying the process of liberating the Korean leadership from some mistaken, pro-Chinese views...and a return to more correct positions on such issues as the role of the world socialist system in the development of the revolutionary process and ways for people to struggle against the aggression of American imperialism.

It is interesting to compare two documents: the article, "They Defended the Socialist Camp" (11/1963) and Kim Il Sung's report at the KWP conference (10/1966). When this is done the evident difference in the position of the Korean leadership which has occurred in three years becomes especially clear.

In 11/1963 in the article, "They Defended the Socialist Camp" (the article was allegedly corrected by Kim Il Sung personally), the Korean leadership broadly supported the policy of the Chinese leaders. The article was directed against the CPSU and the decisions of the XX and XXII Congresses of our Party from beginning to end and contained crude fabrications and anti-Soviet slander.

In particular, the article said, "Some people, passing themselves off as Communists, together with the imperialists unjustly condemn and slander the CPC and PRC and frantically attack them. This is a shameful and very dangerous matter".

In a report at the KWP conference in October 1966 Kim Il Sung criticized the many anti-Marxist attitudes of the Chinese leaders. This was the first public statement of KWP leaders against the policy of the Chinese ruling group. The report had critical allusions to the CPSU, silently overlooking many important issues (the defense of peace, disarmament, the KWP attitude toward the proposal convene an international conference of fraternal Parties). However, the report had an anti-Chinese orientation on the whole.

What were the primary reasons that caused the Korean leadership to change its attitude toward the ruling group of China?

1. As events progressed in Vietnam the KWP leadership became increasingly convinced that the Chinese ruling group was hiding behind high-sounding phrases about the battle against imperialism but is in fact being obstructive in this battle. Meetings and conversations between Soviet leaders and Kim Il Sung, the participation of the KWP in the work of the XIII [SIC] CPSU Party Congress, and the practical measures by the CPSU and Soviet government to give comprehensive assistance to the Vietnamese people have had great importance in this. The desire of the Mao Zedong and his circle to use the Vietnamese situation for their own great power national purposes became increasingly clear to the Korean leadership.

The possibility of military provocations against the DPRK from American and South Korean authorities not being excluded, the Korean leaders now regard doubtfully previous Chinese assurances that China "will always share both sorrow and joy" with the Korean people.

2. The Korean leadership fears that in the event the Chinese leaders carry out plans for an organizational and political split in the international Communist movement and the socialist camp it will end up alone with the Chinese leaders, in a campaign with pro-Chinese splitters. This would undermine the prestige of the KWP and increase the pressure on its leaders from the Chinese leaders.

3. The failure of Chinese leaders in domestic and foreign policy exerted a great sobering influence on the Korean leadership. In a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in November of this year as confirmation of the left opportunism of the Chinese leaders Kim Il Sung spoke of their wavering from one extreme to the other in questions of building Communism in China.

...

As the KWP conference showed, on the question of creating a united anti-imperialist front the Korean leadership acted in defiance of the opinion of the Chinese leaders. The evolution of the views of the KWP leadership on the actions of the Chinese leaders has become more noticeable.

As the situation in Vietnam became more complicated, at the beginning of 1966 the Korean leaders spoke of their disagreement with the positions of the ruling group of China on the issue of Vietnam only in confidential conversations. In October 1966 in a report to a Party conference Kim Il Sung was obviously talking to the Chinese leaders about those who "just talk about being against American imperialism but in fact do not take any specific steps to curb aggression".

[Translator's note: the following paragraph has a handwritten note in the margin, "see [[two words illegible]]" and a vertical line highlighting the first four line (through "to convince")]

In the words of Kim Il Sung, the KWP leadership has unsuccessfully tried to use the visit of a Japanese CP delegation to China and the DPRK headed by Miyamoto to convince the Chinese leaders of the necessity of creating a united anti-imperialist front.

...

The Korean leaders condemn the Chinese leaders for their great power chauvinism, dogmatism, and "left" opportunism. According to statements of the Korean comrades the Chinese do not take changed reality into account, dogmatically repeat individual Marxist-Leninist positions, and drive people to extreme actions under "archaic" and revolutionary slogans.

The Korean leadership is closely following events associated with the conduct of the so-called "Cultural Revolution" in China. In a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in November of this year Kim Il Sung said, "The Chinese want to conduct a cultural revolution at one stroke. Is this not an example of left opportunism on the part of the CPC and its leaders?".

Explanations were given in Korean press articles, speeches by Kim Il Sung at Party conferences, and by Kim Il at the VI session of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly that a genuine cultural revolution is a long and complex process requiring an increase in the cultural and overall educational level of the entire people. Speaking of the forms and methods of conducting a cultural revolution in the DPRK Kim Il, in particular, [43] stressed in [his] report at the VI session of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly in November of this year that the KWP "opposes any subjective haste which contradicts the principles of Marxism-Leninism" and is against "a nihilistic attitude toward national cultural heritage".

...Soon after the start of the "Cultural Revolution" in China the frequency band on which Chinese radio was broadcast in Korean was changed at the initiative of the Korean comrades. The rebroadcast hours were changed and they became less convenient for listeners.

...

A sharp rebuke was given by the Korean leadership about accusations from the CPC and APT [Albanian Workers' Party] that the KWP allegedly "is fencesitting". In a report to a KWP conference Kim Il Sung said, "Those who slander us are themselves sitting on a wobbly fence".

...DPRK economic ties with China are exerting a great influence on the position of the Korean leadership and the policy it pursues.

The Korean leadership has been forced to take into account the possible economic sanctions to which the Chinese leaders might resort and which would bring serious economic consequences to the DPRK.

... The military doctrine of the Korean leadership was based on Chinese idea of so-called "people's war" until recently. The importance of modern types of weapons, including nuclear [weapons] and missiles, was belittled, and the military economic potential of the main enemy, the United States and its allies, was not taken into consideration.

At the present time the Korean comrades are making certain changes in their attitudes toward questions of the strategy and tactics of waging war and training troops.

The delivery of Soviet military equipment has played a great role in this. Based on the observations of Soviet military specialists, the Korean military is beginning to understand its importance in modern warfare during the process of training to master the new equipment.

This is one of the main reasons for sending Korean servicemen to train in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, all the Korean servicemen studying in Chinese military schools are being recalled. There is information that the Chinese leadership has allegedly repeatedly suggested to the Koreans that they again send their military specialists for

training but the Korean leadership is refraining from this.

Some frictions have also appeared between Korea and China in connection with the sending of Korean military volunteers to Vietnam (right now this is a group of more than 100 men). According to unofficial information, Chinese leaders have convinced the Korean leadership that the best assistance to Vietnam from the DPRK is to unleash military operations against the Americans on the Korean peninsula. The Chinese leadership has promised to give comprehensive assistance to the DPRK for the sake of this. The Korean comrades have rejected this option in spite of pressure from the Chinese, promoting their own counterplan - sending volunteers to Vietnam.

...The Korean leadership will evidently try and continue to demonstrate their "independence" in approaching a solution to the important problems of the socialist camp and the international Communist movement.

It might evidently be viewed as a concession to the Chinese to consider the position of the Korean leadership with regard to Yugoslavia and India. Although the Koreans are also not criticizing the Soviet government right now for expanding Soviet-Indian cooperation, however as before they lay the blame for complications on the Indo-Chinese border to the "reactionary forces of India".

Meanwhile, in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador Kim Il Sung said, "Instead of finding a correct solution to this conflict the Chinese have complicated it and thereby slowed the progress of the revolution not only in India but also in all of Asia"...

The Korean leadership views the immediate prospects for achieving unity in the socialist camp and the international Communist movement skeptically. Knowing the Chinese leaders well, the Korean leadership evidently thinks that no criticism, either open or disguised, will have an affect on them. The Korean leadership sees the solution to the situation which has developed, as Kim Il Sung said in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador, "leave the Chinese alone", then "they will fight among themselves and find the correct solution".

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