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Record of a Conversation between Stalin, Kim Il Sung, Pak Heon-yeong, Zhou Enlai, and Peng Dehuai

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Translated by Gary Goldberg.

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Summary:

Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean officials discuss the military situation in Korea and the status of armistice talks.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

- English Translation

4 September 1952

Present:

from our side: Cdes. Molotov, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Beria, Bulganin, and Kaganovich
from the Chinese and Korean sides: Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, Li Fuchun, Zhang Wentian, Su Yu, and
Pak Heon-yeong [Pak Hon Yong].

Interpreters: Mun [Mun Il], Shi Zhe, and Fedorenko.

Stalin. What is the mood of the Korean population?

Kim Il Sung. The mood is good.

Stalin. Does Pak Heon-yeong agree?

Pak Heon-yeong. Yes, the mood is good.

Stalin. And in the troops?

Kim Il Sung. And the mood in the troops is good.

Stalin. But what does Peng Dehuai think?

Peng Dehuai. Good.

Kim Il Sung. The overall situation is favorable if the bombing is not considered.

Stalin. Do you have fighter aircraft?

Kim Il Sung. There is one division.

Stalin. It is difficult for China to engage their aircraft since everyone can say that these are no longer volunteers but government troops. Volunteers do not have their own aircraft. We can ask, "will this be to the advantage of the democratic camp?" In my opinion, it is disadvantageous to declare that the Chinese volunteer troops are waging war. Kim Il Sung needs to have Korean aircraft.

Kim Il Sung. If material conditions permit, then we could create one or two air divisions.

Stalin. Even though the Korean people are tired of war they are deservedly called a heroic people. Since the Korean people have suffered we are ready to dismantle one or two of our own divisions for Korea.

Kim Il Sung. Thank you.

Stalin. Do you have a fighter division?

Kim Il Sung. Yes.

Stalin. It can be moved.

Kim Il Sung. There is also one division in a [training] school.

Stalin. We can provide materiel for one to three divisions.

Kim Il Sung. We could supply the people for three divisions.

Stalin. Good, we will provide the materiel for three divisions.

What else is Korea lacking?

Kim Il Sung. As a consequence of the fact that enemy bombing is constantly increasing we need to increase our anti-aircraft artillery. Not long ago we asked for five regiments of anti-aircraft artillery but we need 10 regiments. We are asking you for five, Cde. Stalin, and five from the Chinese comrades. Mao Zedong said that it is not possible for China at the present time to grant this request from Korea. Therefore we are asking you to give us 10 regiments of anti-aircraft artillery.

Stalin. How many ground divisions do you have?

Kim Il Sung. Eighteen divisions.

Stalin. And how much [anti-aircraft] artillery?

Kim Il Sung. We have several regiments but they are underequipped.

Stalin. There are two [anti-aircraft] artillery regiments in each of our divisions. It's also the same situation in China. What about you?

Kim Il Sung. We have the same system.

Stalin. If you lack something draw up a respective list.

Kim Il Sung. Such a list has been drawn up.

Stalin. Do you have mortars?

Kim Il Sung. Yes, 122-mm's.

Stalin. We'll give you materiel for 10 anti-aircraft artillery regiments.

Kim Il Sung. Thank you, Cde. Stalin.

Regarding ground troops, we do not have enough 122-mm howitzers and other weapons. We could submit additional requests.

Stalin. What else is lacking?

Kim Il Sung. The situation is especially critical with support to the engineer and signals troops. There are great shortfalls here. It's the same situation in aviation. We have a shortage of equipment and materials. This is what will force us to halt production of 122-mm shells in a month.

Stalin. Send us a list of materials which you need.

Kim Il Sung. A list has been drawn up.

Stalin. What's the situation with food, bread and rice?

Kim Il Sung. The harvest was good this year but there is not enough until next year. Mao Zedong has promised to supply us with food and clothing.

Stalin. Do you eat bread, or only rice?

Kim Il Sung. At the most difficult moment you, Cde. Stalin, sent us 50,000 tons of food as a gift. Our people love wheat flour. Overcoming difficulties at the present time, the Korean population is making ends meet but we are poorly supplied with transport and we are not able to solve this problem by ourselves. We would like to receive motor vehicles, tractors, and chemical fertilizer from the Soviet government.

Stalin. Send us the respective list. They say that you, the Koreans and the Chinese, have some differences with respect to the issue of how you ought to conduct yourselves in talks with the Americans. Is this true?

Kim Il Sung. In my opinion, we have no differences of principle. We agreed with those alternatives which the Chinese comrades proposed but in view of the serious situation in which the Korean people have found themselves we are interested in the quickest possible conclusion of an armistice [*peremirie*]. The Chinese comrades are also interested in this.

Stalin. We have discussed this issue with the Chinese delegation here. A proposal was made not to agree to the conditions about POWs offered by the Americans and to insist on our own. The opinion was expressed that if the Americans do not wish to return 20% of the Chinese and Korean POWs then 10% of the Americans ought to be held until the Chinese and Korean POWs are returned, or to say that if they do not return these 20% of Chinese and Korean POWs then 20% of their POWs will not be returned as long as they hold the Chinese and Korean POWs. It is possible that this position is even better.

One could stop with this and reach a cease-fire. Continue the talks about the unreturned part of POWs after a halt in combat operations, after a cease-fire.

I do not know what your attitude is, but I think that in such a situation everyone would be convinced of the correctness of your position.

The Americans might say that that 20% of the Chinese and Korean POWs do not want to return to their homelands. In this event it ought to be declared that we do not believe this.

In such a gambit the issue of the 20% is put off and 80% are returned. This is the essence of the proposal.

The Chinese comrades also think that at the present time [we] ought not submit any new proposals and that [we] ought to wait until new proposals are made by the Americans in order to make our own changes. Do you know about this?

Kim Il Sung. We heard about it from Mao Zedong.

Stalin. What did Mao Zedong say about this?

Kim Il Sung. In the conversation with us Mao Zedong suggested several alternatives: first, continue to adamantly insist on the return of all POWs; second, resolve the issue of all POWs after an armistice; third, inasmuch as the enemy is holding our POWs we should also hold a corresponding number of enemy POWs.

Thus, Mao Zedong's point of view coincides with your point of view, Cde. Stalin.

We think that these three alternatives are the most suitable. But I would like to ask your advice on what step we ought to make to achieve a solution to the problem.

Stalin. In my opinion, [you] need to continue to insist on the return of all POWs for some time (a month or several weeks). If this is not successful, then propose 20%. This is not about alternatives here, but positions. The first position is the return of all POWs; the second position is the non-return of 20% of the POWs of each side.

It is true that here yet one more issue arises: whether [you] ought to offer some new proposal or wait until the Americans make a new proposal. I think that nothing new ought to be offered. It is necessary to insist on a complete exchange of POWs and see how the situation develops.

The second position is advantageous both to us and your propaganda. They don't return 20% of the POWs to you and you don't return 20%. The second position will introduce demoralization into the American camp. Sentiment for the return of the POWs and ending the war will grow. This would be to your advantage.

That's our opinion about this.

How are the Americans conduct themselves in battle, are they fighting well?

Kim Il Sung. The Americans' weakest feature is their poor morale.

Stalin. The reason for this lies in the fact that the war is unpopular. I would like to know how they fight: with enthusiasm, with great proficiency, with the superiority of forces?

Peng Dehuai. The Americans conducted more than 200 offensives in January and February but their successes were only 1%. We conducted about 30 offensives in a month, of which 80-90% were successful.

Stalin. How were these successes reflected?

Peng Dehuai. We managed to destroy small enemy subunits, a platoon or a company.

Stalin. Do you agree, Kim Il Sung?

Kim Il Sung. Of course, I agree.

Stalin. Are the Americans' fortifications strong?

Peng Dehuai. Recently the fortifications have become considerably stronger but ours have also increased. The Americans' structures themselves are weaker than ours but their equipment is better.

Stalin. What is the number of fortified lines?

Peng Dehuai. Three lines.

Stalin. But how many lines of fortifications do you have?

Peng Dehuai. Essentially two lines, but a third is just being created.

Stalin. Do you have minefields?

Peng Dehuai. We have few mines and barbed wire obstacles. We seize them from the enemy and use them against them.

Stalin. We developed the practice of minefields extensively during the war. There were special maps indicating the passages for our troops. We think that it is impossible to fight without mines and minefields.

Peng Dehuai. We have a very small distance between our forward line and the enemy, about 300-500 meters in all.

Stalin. It is evident that your forward line is too far advanced.

Peng Dehuai. Possibly this is caused by the fact that we have been constantly been moving forward since April.

Stalin. What is the distance between the fortified lines?

Peng Dehuai. The distance is short. It depends on the terrain. In some places the lines merge and in some the distance is up to 20 kilometers. At the present time we are creating reinforced concrete structures.

Stalin. Do you have trenches?

Peng Dehuai. Yes.

Malenkoy. What explains the fact that we take few prisoners but the enemy takes many?

Peng Dehuai. On the whole we have taken more prisoner than the enemy.

Stalin. How many Chinese and Koreans are prisoner?

Peng Dehuai. According to our estimates there are 12,000 Chinese prisoners but according to American reports, 20,000. The number of Korean prisoners is larger, since before October 1951 the Americans were able to capture a large number of Korean prisoners. The Americans also captured many prisoners from reserve brigades during an offensive.

Twelve thousand prisoners have been captured from the time the Chinese volunteers entered the Korean War, of which 8,000 are Americans. The number of South Korean [*lisymanovskie*] POWs is 40,000. However, many of the foreign POWs have died in view of the difficult material conditions.

Kim Il Sung. According to the list which we have submitted we have taken a total of 12,000 men prisoner, of which 4,416 are foreigners and the rest South Koreans. Among the prisoners are 300 American pilots, of which more than 30 are officers. About 27,000 South Koreans have transferred to units of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army. These POWs have not been reported in the press.

Malenkoy. Are the Chinese volunteers at the front being rotated?

Peng Dehuai. Yes.

Malenkoy. Does this mean that the Chinese units receiving the opportunity to train?

Peng Dehuai. Yes. All volunteer units in Korea will be replaced by August 1953. The entire command staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (army, corps, division) will have completely rotated through the Korean front.

Stalin. Do you have Katyushas?

Peng Dehuai. One division at the front, another in the rear.

Stalin. Are partisan detachments operating in the enemy's rear?

Kim Il Sung. Yes, they are operating, although the conditions are very difficult for this.

Stalin. Are Japanese being captured?

Peng Dehuai. Only Japanese who are American citizens are being captured.

Malenkov. What explains the fact that few aircraft are being shot down during the massive American air raids on North Korea?

Peng Dehuai. We think that there are many. About 5,800 American aircraft have been shot down since the start of the war.

Stalin. Do Chinese pilots mastered jet aircraft?

Peng Dehuai. Chinese pilots can participate in combat operations when Soviet pilots are conducting them.

Stalin. What are they doing, are they afraid?

Peng Dehuai. They have enough courage but they are not able to fly in formation.

Stalin. They need to be launched into the air more often. Only in the air can they learn. At one time Soviet pilots also did not want to fly, they preferred to sit in school. But then they gradually began to fly, and they learned to fly. Now we rate pilots by the number of sorties. Those who have more sorties get awards. School training provides little. Combat training provides real experience. The air need not be feared. On the contrary, one ought to feel at home in the air. It is also necessary to teach night flying. Otherwise you will have no aviation. A system of awards is also needed.

Do you have orders and medals?

Peng Dehuai. Not yet. We intend to introduce them in 1953.

Stalin. It can't be done that way. It seems to me that they have an anarchical disdain for orders and medals. They also had no generals. They think that all this is against communism. Meanwhile, the presence of ranks in an army, insignia, and a system of awards has great importance. It is impossible to create a real army otherwise. Otherwise only partisan units might exist. They waged a civil war for 15 years, expelled the American imperialists, achieved victory, but no military ranks, insignia, or orders exist in the army. This is wrong. People grow and their growth should find its own expression. One ought to think about this seriously. The officer corps ought to be well supplied, there should be salaries, etc. The main thing is to retain and support officers and create all the necessary conditions for them, because they are military specialists.

Zhou Enlai. Cde. Stalin, your comments are absolutely correct. But such a situation has developed in the Chinese army because of the fact that we have been waging a civil war for the past 20 years and have practically been in war communism conditions. At the present time we have been taking steps to reorganize our army and convert army service from voluntary to compulsory, that is, to conduct military conscription.

At the present time there are 4,300,000 men in the ranks of our army, of which 1,440,000 are officers, beginning with sergeant and above [Translator's note: evidently non-commissioned and commissioned officers are lumped together here as "officers"]. In addition, we have 530,000 internal troops. We have already started to reorganize our army beginning this year, and in 1954 it will be completely restructured. We propose to reduce our army to 3 million and by improving the army's equipment subsequently only 2,500,00 men will remain plus a half million internal troops.

Stalin. That's correct, but two and half million is the minimum. It is necessary to have a strong air force and navy besides the infantry.

Peng Dehuai. We could not reorganize our army earlier because the war broke out in Korea and we had to allocate considerable resources to maintain our volunteer forces in Korea.

The expenses total \$2,600,000 US from the time Chinese volunteers entered the war in Korea to the end of this year. In connection with the fact that a stable financial and economic situation has been established in the country at the present time we will be able to reorganize our army and introduce a system of salaries in it comparatively rapidly.

Kim Il Sung. With whom specifically we will be able to hold talks about existing requests and requisitions connected with military issues?

Stalin. With Cdes. Molotov and Bulganin.

We intend to send one division of jet bombers each to Korea and China if, of course, you want this.

Zhou Enlai and Kim Il Sung. Of course we want this, Cde. Stalin.

Stalin. I would like to invite the Chinese delegation which came to us openly to an official dinner. As regards those who came unofficially then I want to hold a home dinner for them.

Zhou Enlai and Kim Il Sung thank Cde. Stalin.

Recorded by N. Fedorenko

[handwritten: signature and 5.IX]

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