

1949

Speeches/Documents

Title: Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong

Author: Mikoyan

Date:
January 30, 1949

Source: *[Source: APRF: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, Ll. 1-6. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 33-37. Translated for CWIHP from Russian by Sergey Radchenko.]*

Description:

The first conversation with Mao Zedong took place on 30 January 1949. Members of the CCP CC Politburo Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De and Ren Bishi, as well as Mao Zedong's interpreter Shi Zhe participated in the conversation. From our side comrades I[van] Kovalev and E. Kovalev were present.

After short questioning and answers as to how [we] flew, Mao Zedong, at his initiative recounted in detail about the military situation in China.

ON THE MILITARY SITUATION IN CHINA

Mao Zedong stated that, in essence, the military stage of the Chinese Revolution must be considered complete. There is a 260 million population under the rule of the Guomindang, and a 210 million population—in the liberated regions. The CCP has 2 million 200 thousand people in the army, of them 1 million 200 thousand are in the area of Nanjing and 900 thousand (Lin Biao's forces) are in the Beiping [Beijing]-Tianjin area. The Guomindang altogether has 1 million 100 thousand people, scattered from Urumqi to Shanghai, and therefore poorly mobile. All of the Guomindang's divisions, with the exception of four, were defeated by us several times over, therefore their battle quality is low. The best Guomindang divisions, equipped by the Americans, have either been destroyed or captured. Bai Chongxi, who has his forces in the area of Wuhan, sent to the representatives of the CCP in three places his own representatives for talks, and an agreement has already been reached with him. Bai Chongxi is sending two of his divisions to Shanghai and Nanjing regions. He demanded that [Republic of China Acting President] Li Zongren remove [Legislative Yuan head] Sun Fo from the premiership. We know that Jiang Jieshi left Sun Fo as the premier so that, while in retirement, he could run the government in fact. The communists have documentary data to the effect that Jiang Jieshi, even after resigning, continues to control the Guomindang forces, for example in Xi'an. The Guomindang will organize resistance in the south in the coastal regions of Zhejiang. The Guomindang will not fight hard for Nanjing and Shanghai.

In Mao Zedong's opinion, judging by the mood of the capitalists and the public of Nanjing and Shanghai, these cities could take Beiping's [Beijing's] road, that is—surrender without a fight under given conditions so as not to subject these cities to destruction. However, the communists make their plans expecting the worst. They are preparing after a short breather and preparation to take these cities by force. Peaceful resolution of events at Beiping [Beijing] cut the time for rest and preparation of these forces for the offensive. The time is needed not only for rest but:

a) For digesting and educating three hundred thousand captured Guomindang-ists, who in the recent time joined the People's Liberation Army.

b) For tightening up the rear and restoring the destroyed railroads, which feed the frontline;

c) For accumulation of cartridges and shells from current production, since there is little in reserve. The matter is complicated by the fact that ammunition is needed for weapons of American, Japanese, Czechoslovak and Soviet types;

d) Time is also needed to prepare cadres to manage the regions of Shanghai and Nanjing, for one cannot fully rely on the local cadres. 20 thousand people are being prepared. Efforts will also be needed to liquidate the Guomindang apparatus of managing forces of northern China, subordinate to Fu Zuoyi;

e) Time is needed to prepare economic directorates of Shanghai and Nanjing regions—there is little foodstuff, one should stock up. We do not have enough time to print money for these regions.

The capture of Nanjing by the People's Liberation forces should be put off until April. Of course, at the present time one may also turn to the offensive, but in this case the chance of success will equal 80%. In the month of April, however, there will be all 100% chance of success. In order to win for sure in the Nanjing and Shanghai regions one will have to move Lin Biao's forces, which are the best, from the Beiping [Beijing] area to the South and the West so as to rid the Guomindang of an opportunity to throw in from there large reinforcements into the Nanjing-Shanghai area. The situation in the Beiping [Beijing] area is complicated and one will need some time to establish oneself firmly here.

Fu Zuoyi's forces have not left Beiping [Beijing] yet. [We] think that tomorrow—the day after tomorrow [they] will leave. The protection of warehouses and the order in the city is still managed by the Guomindang forces. In the next few days we will move four of our divisions into Beiping [Beijing] and gradually will replace the Guomindang guards. A unified city management has been appointed, composed of 7 people, of whom 4 are communists, including the chairman Ye Jianying (PLA Chief of Staff). Fu Zuoyi's forces numbering more than 200 thousand people will be broken up into two groups—one will be moved out to the northeast of Nanjing, and the other—to the southwest, where they must reorganize. Inasmuch as these forces were not defeated in battle but surrendered to us peacefully on certain conditions, this process of reorganization is complex and is broken down into stages. The first stage will take a month, in the course of which no reorganization will take place, all efforts will be directed toward agitation and internal degradation. The second stage will come after that, when the most reactionary officer corps will be extracted from the divisions; the most diehard will be immediately expelled from the army, others will be directed to political education courses, then the majority will be sent home, and a part will be used for training the reserves. At the third stage a real organization will be conducted so as to mix up and dilute Guomindang-ists in the reorganized units of the People's Liberation Army. For every three former Guomindang-ists there would be 8 from the People's Liberation Army. Until this reorganization is for the most part complete it is dangerous to move out the main mass of our forces from the Beiping [Beijing] area.

To my question whether a pause in the attack for 2-3 months might give the Guomindang breathing space for overcoming panic, assembling and organization of resistance, since the agreement of the Nanjingers to peace talks shows how strongly they need breathing space, Mao Zedong replied the following: peaceful maneuver of the Guomindang-ists, instead of weakening the communists, strengthened their ranks and caused degradation in the ranks of the Guomindang to such an extent that the Guomindang cannot manage any longer. Resistance will be organized, but they will not succeed in anything serious. When the communists manage to finish preparation and strike with certainty, the remnants of the Guomindang forces will be obliterated.

ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE CCP TOWARD ITS MISTAKES

Furthermore, Mao Zedong stated that he would like to discuss with me questions of foreign policy, military questions, economic questions and questions of attitude toward the Guomindang. At the same time he was saying: "Please take into consideration that China has fallen far behind Russia, we are weak Marxists, make many mistakes and if one looks at our work with Russia's measure then it will turn out that we have nothing." I replied that these words, possibly, manifest the shyness of the leaders of the Chinese Com[munist] Party, but it is difficult to agree with them. One cannot manage a civil war in China for 20 years and lead it to such a victory while being a weak Marxist. As for mistakes, all active parties have them. Our party also makes mistakes but it firmly holds to the rule of ruthlessly uncovering its own mistakes so as not to repeat them and learn from them.

Mao Zedong added that they make mistakes frequently, and correct them frequently, and gave an example. In 1946 the CCP committed a mistake in the conduct of the land reform. When [they] began looking into it then it turned out that as far back as 1933 they wrote absolutely correctly about the land reform, which they forgot in 1946. If this were read again in 1946 these mistakes would not be committed. They once again reprinted in 1946 what had been written on the land reform in 1933 and openly declared this mistake of theirs to the peasants, taking full responsibility for mistakes, for the leadership is responsible for the mistakes of the low-level cadres, though the leadership itself did not commit these mistakes. I noted that one cannot agree with Mao Zedong's statement to the effect that if

one looked at the Chinese Revolution with a Russian measure, then it would turn out that there is nothing. First of all, the Chinese Revolution represents a great historical event; secondly, it would be incorrect to apply the Russian measure to that concrete historical reality, in which the revolution in China is taking course. As if to confirm this Mao Zedong said that the CCP in 1936 in the Soviet regions manifested dogmatism, copying the Soviet methods, which led then to a serious defeat. Mao Zedong, half-jokingly, said the following phrase: "Despite China's backwardness in comparison with Russia I consider that the Chinese peasants are more conscious than all American workers and many English workers."

MARXIST EDUCATION OF THE CCP CADRES

He stated further that one of the big tasks of the CCP is the Marxist education of the cadres. They used to consider that the cadres must read all the Marxist literature. Now they convinced themselves that this is impossible, for their cadres are studying while simultaneously conducting a lot of practical work. Therefore they required from their cadres to read 12 Marxist works. Counting these works (Manifesto, From Utopia to Science, The State and the Revolution, Questions of Leninism etc.) he did not mention a single Chinese Marxist work. I then asked Mao Zedong whether he considers it correct that in the list of 12 books for party enlightenment of the CCP cadres there is not a single work of the CCP leaders, shedding light, theoretically, on the experience of the Chinese Revolution. Mao Zedong replied that he, as the leader of the party, brought nothing new to Marxism-Leninism, and cannot put himself on the same shelf with Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Raising a toast to the health of Comrade Stalin he stressed that at the basis of the current victories of the Chinese Revolution lies the teaching of Lenin-Stalin and that Stalin is not only the teacher of the peoples of the Sov[jiet] Union but also the teacher of the Chinese people and the people of the whole world. Mao Zedong said about himself that he is a pupil of Stalin and does not attribute significance to his own theoretical works, that they merely implement the teaching of Marxism-Leninism, without enriching it with anything. Moreover, he personally sent a strict telegram to the localities, forbidding to list his surname together with the surnames of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, though he has to argue about this with his closest comrades.

I replied that this speaks to Mao Zedong's modesty, but one cannot agree with him. Marxism-Leninism is not applied in China mechanically, but on the basis of taking into account peculiarities of the specific conditions of China. The Chinese Revolution has its own road, which gives to it the look of an anti-imperialist revolution. Therefore shedding light on the experience of the CCP cannot help but be historically valuable, cannot help but enrich Marxist science. Can one deny also that the summing up of the Chinese experience has a theoretical value for the revolutionary movement of the countries of Asia? Of course, not. Mao Zedong remarked that with them it was the supporters of [CCP Deputy Commander in Chief] Wang Ming who laid the main stress on the peculiarity of China for struggle against the party line. I replied to this that usually nationalistic elements use concrete historical specifics of their country for diverting the party to the road of bourgeois transformation; Marxists, however, take these specifics into consideration so as to lead the revolution in a Marxist-Leninist way, with which [assertion] Mao Zedong chose not to argue.

At this the conversation ended.