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Embassy of the GDR in the USSR, 'Note about a Meeting of Comrade Goede with Comrade Kapitsa, Head of the 1st Far Eastern Department of the MID on 14 April 1976'

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Summary:

Goede and Kapitsa discuss the dismissal of Deng Xiaoping and recent appointment of Hua Guofeng following anti-Mao demonstrations. They also discuss Soviet relations with Cambodia and the DRV, and Sino-Japanese and Sino-American relations.

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Embassy of the GDR in the USSR
Moscow, 31 May 1977

Note about a Meeting
of Comrade Goede with Comrade Kapitsa^[1],
Head of the 1st Far Eastern Department of the MID^[2] on 14 April 1976

Comrade Goede asked for an assessment of the current situation in the PR China - especially in light of the recent anti-Maoist demonstrations - as well as about China's relations with a couple of states.

Comrade Kapitsa made the following remarks:

1. The appointment of Hua Guofeng as Premier of the State Council is unconstitutional; it came about by ignoring the Central Committee of the Maoist party and the parliament.

Hua Guofeng was appointed by Mao Zedong personally with the support of the Politburo.

The Soviet Embassy in Beijing was officially told by the Chinese side that Hua Guofeng's appointment is to be considered as final.

The Society comrades are of the opinion that a replacement of Hua Guofeng in the near future is hardly likely.

Based on this information, and because of the necessity "to work" with Hua Guofeng, it was decided to send a "formal congratulation" to Hua Guofeng at the occasion of his appointment.

2. The following is characteristic for the domestic situation in the PR China:

□The domestic situation is "entirely determined by the person of Mao Zedong".

□Currently Mao Zedong is undertaking all efforts to guarantee that after his death those forces come to power from which he expects the continuation of his course. Accordingly he is supporting and nurturing the 'left' extremist faction represented by the 'Shanghai' Group.

□The 'Shanghai' Group is in control of the party and propaganda apparatus. However, its positions are weak within the Army and the government. In addition, there is its relative ignorance and incapability concerning economic matters. "They are unable to economically govern the country." Regarding future developments, it must be noted that in those bodies, where decisions are made about appointments for the most important posts (in the Central Committee and in the parliament), the 'pragmatists' and the representatives of the Army are in the majority.

□After Zhou Enlai's death, the question of the new Premier was "of utmost importance" to all factions in the Beijing leadership. The 'Shanghai' Group attempted by all means to prevent the appointment of Deng Xiaoping, and it succeeded in this regard. Eventually one did settle on Hua Guofeng.

Hua Guofeng is “a person acceptable to all sides”. Mao Zedong and the ‘Shanghai’ Group were in favor of the appointment because he is still relatively young and had made his career during the period of the ‘Cultural Revolution’. Furthermore, he is a ‘fellow countryman’^[3] of Mao Zedong.

The ‘pragmatists’ opted for Hua Guofeng, because in their opinion he has the necessary qualifications to guide the economy and the state due to his previous experience in the area of agriculture, and because of having been the responsible official for the nuclear sector and a Minister for Public Security.

The Army was supporting his appointment because of his previous role as a Political Commissar of a military district.

The appointment of Hua Guofeng as the Premier of the State Council came as a surprise to many, especially so in the imperialist states. The latter had already regarded the appointment of Deng Xiaoping “as final”. From the onset, the Soviet comrades had considered the appointment of Deng Xiaoping as not very likely; they were of the opinion that Zhou Enlai’s successor will be “a consensus candidate”.

- The replacement of Deng Xiaoping was met with regret in many circles of Chinese society. Here one has to note that major parts of the Chinese population are “tired” of the domestic political turmoil and the constantly recurring campaigns and purges. Many people, among them also Marxists, associated with Deng Xiaoping the hope for a return to political and economic stability, the development of productive forces et cetera.

The most recent honors for Zhou Enlai must be seen in this context. For many Chinese, he was regarded as a representative for a stable economic and political development of the country.

It is interesting that during the demonstrations to honor Zhou Enlai on Tiananmen Square slogans appeared like “Back to True Marxism” and other similar content. This has to be seen as an expression of opinions existing in many circles that the ‘pragmatists’ (in this case Zhou Enlai respectively Deng Xiaoping) are “still better than the chaos”.

- Mao Zedong was “shocked” about the scope of the events on Tiananmen Square. At the same time he used them as the reason for instituting the final replacement of Deng Xiaoping.

Deng Xiaoping’s dismissal was orchestrated exclusively by Mao Zedong himself and the Politburo of the Maoist party. “Mao Zedong was afraid to settle this issue in the Central Committee and the parliament”.

□It is rather unlikely that the demonstrations on Tiananmen Square had been arranged by Mao Zedong himself with the intention to create a pretext for the replacement of Deng Xiaoping. The extent and spontaneity of the events do not support such a theory. Furthermore, originally the demonstrations on Mourning Sunday were just held with the intention to honor Zhou Enlai. The events only displayed their anti-Maoist character after the violent intervention by the Army and the militia.

Overall one has to assess that Mao Zedong was unsettled by those recent events and “panicked”. Among else, this is shown by the recently intensifying organized campaign to support Hua Guofeng, especially in the Army.

Regarding further development of the confrontation between the rivaling factions,

especially after the departure of Mao Zedong from the political stage, there are actually existing two scenarios:

1. The group of the 'pragmatists' is winning.

This would mean

- the stabilization of the domestic situation in the country and its accelerated and continuous economic development,
- the continuation of the current anti-Soviet, great-power chauvinist course of China,
- the further development of collaboration between China and the imperialist states, especially with the United States

2. The 'left' extremists ('Shanghai' Group) are gaining the upper hand.

This would result in a continuation of permanent domestic turmoil and the political and economic disruption of the country.

At the same time, a victory of the 'left' extremists would, however, mean the "chance for the emergence of an anti-imperialist moment" in Chinese policy.

A continuation of the anti-Soviet objectives in China's foreign policy course would have to be assumed; however, changes in this regard could not be entirely excluded.

A victory of the 'left' extremist faction in the domestic political confrontations in Beijing would signify "without doubt the more favorable option" for world socialism; since it would objectively result in a weakening of China and thus a limitation of the potential to implement its great-power chauvinist objectives.

A seizure of power by "healthy" forces is still too be considered as an option "one cannot exclude by hundred percent".

3. There are "no new aspects" in Soviet-Chinese relations. The Soviet Union will continue with its known course towards China.

Comrade Ilychev[\[4\]](#) will probably travel in the near future to Beijing "for about a month".

4. Situation in Cambodia:

- "We are not knowing exactly what is going on there. The Vietnamese comrades as well cannot say anything final".

It is not known which people are actually in power in Phnom Penh. "The currently known people are straw men. The people making the decisions are still in the background."

- Sihanouk's resignation[\[5\]](#) means "in my opinion" a weakening of Beijing's positions and a strengthening of the influence of the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam].

□The Soviet Union as well as the DRV have several times signaled to the Cambodian side their willingness to develop relations. There is so far no reaction from Phnom Penh, however; the influence of Beijing is obvious.

□

The Soviet Union is willing to open an embassy in Phnom Penh. Among else, such a step is contingent on what extent the Cambodian side will guarantee the necessary working and living conditions. "As long as we do not receive assurances on these issues, we are not in a hurry".

□The Vietnamese comrades are of the opinion that "in the provinces" the sympathies for the DRV are stronger than those for China. "According to the opinion of the Vietnamese comrades, this tendency will grow over the course of time, and it will become the dominant one in the entire country". "One has to really hope" that the influence of the DRV will increase in Cambodia and the Vietnamese comrades will "be proven right". This would be "very positive".

□The few embassies remaining in Phnom Penh are completely isolated from the outside world. They do not have contacts with the Cambodian organs. The supply of the embassies, especially with food, is very bad; the Cambodian side has demanded 'self-supply' from many representations.

5. DRV:

The Vietnamese comrades are pursuing a "good policy". "On almost all questions they are on our side - in their attitude towards the socialist camp, towards detente et cetera". However, they have to take their direct vicinity to China into their considerations.

There do exist objective "dividing factors" between both countries, like

- China's territorial claims to the DRV, border provocations by the Chinese side; □ Beijing's attempts to nudge Thailand towards an anti-Vietnamese policy et cetera.

At the same time the DRV is not interested in an aggravation of relations with the PR China. The "cordial" congratulations by the DRV to Hua Guofeng for his appointment as Premier of the State Council is "tactics".

6. Relations Japan - China:

- The Soviet Union does assume that the Japanese-Chinese Treaty will be signed. Both countries are interested in this; each side is viewing it "as a means to disrupt relations of the other side with the Soviet Union". Japan's interest in the signing of the treaty is bigger here than China's. Due to the unstable domestic situation in China, however, Japan has so far not pursued any special activities to achieve a signing of the treaty in the near future. The character of the treaty is more like an agreement "on the intentions" of both sides rather than an alliance treaty. "What we do not like about it, are its anti-Soviet elements".

If those would not exist, "this issue would have no special importance to us". "Leaving out Vietnam, our positions in Southeast Asia are in any case less relevant than those of Japan and China".

The Soviet Union is attempting to exert influence on Japan "in order to achieve a watering down of the anti-Soviet elements of the treaty".

Because of the anti-Soviet accentuation of the treaty, the United States are eager to convince Japan of its signing. They [U.S.] are of the opinion that China is a weak

partner of Japan, so that a Japanese-Chinese alliance would not result in a 'threat' to the United States.

- In the future Japan and the China will become closer. "This is inevitable". Japan does need the Chinese resources and the Chinese market. China on the other side is interested in acquiring Japanese equipment, technologies, et cetera. "Here it does not shy away from any expenses".

On the other hand there do exist objective limits to a Japanese-Chinese rapprochement. "There will not be a major rapprochement between both countries".

The following factors are of relevance here:

- Each side wants to avoid to become an "appendix" of the other.

- For Japan, the relations with the United States have priority compared to those with China. This is mainly a class issue: Japan has objectively more in common with the imperialist United States than with China. "Moreover, the Japanese are of the opinion that it is better to maintain good relations with a strong (albeit far away in territorial terms) power than with a weak power, even if it is situated in the immediate vicinity".

- There are objective contradictions between China and Japan due to the different sets of interests in Southeast Asia. Both sides are eager to expand their influence in this region.

- The unstable domestic political situation in China is currently holding Japan back from major activities to develop relations, because it is interested in long-term and stable relations.

7. "No new aspects" do exist in relations between China and the United States. Beijing is "displeased" with critical statements about China in the U.S. press.

The upcoming presidential elections in the United States are coming with certain problems for China. On the one hand it is supporting the opponents of detente in the United States, on the other hand it "cannot go too far" in its criticism of [U.S. President Gerald] Ford and [Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger.

The replacement of Deng Xiaoping caused a certain "reluctance" in the United States towards China; the United States had considered his appointment already "as secure".

China is still using visits by reactionary politicians from the West as "leverage" against more realistically thinking circles. In this sense one has to view Schlesinger's [\[6\]](#) visit in Beijing.

The Chinese side was "not very pleased" with [former U.S. President Richard] Nixon's visit [\[7\]](#) because of his statements against Ford.

The "Chinese card" will "not play a role" in the upcoming elections in the United States. "There domestic politics, relations with the Soviet Union, detente, and other topics will dominate".

Signed [Zellmer]
Zellmer

CC:

1x Central Committee of the SED, Comrade [Hermann] Axen [Department of International Relations]

1x Central Committee of the SED, Comrade [Paul] Markowski

1x [GDR] Foreign Ministry, Comrade [Foreign Minister Oskar] Fischer

1x [GDR] Foreign Ministry, Comrade [Herbert] Krolikowski

1x [GDR] Foreign Ministry, Comrade [Klaus] Willerding

1x [GDR] Foreign Ministry, Comrade Grabowski

1x Embassy [Moscow], Comrade [Ambassador Harry] Ott

1x Embassy [Moscow], Comrade Goede

[\[1\]](#) Mikhail Kapitsa (1921-1995).

[\[2\]](#) Министерство иностранных дел (Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del/MID), the Ministry of External Affairs of the Soviet Union.

[\[3\]](#) Most of his career he spent in Hunan Province where Mao Zedong was born.

[\[4\]](#) Head of the Soviet delegation at Soviet-Chinese border negotiations.

[\[5\]](#) Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012). The resignation as head of the Cambodian exile government in Beijing.

[\[6\]](#) James Schlesinger (1929-2014), U.S. Secretary of Defense 1973-1975. Dismissed by U.S. President Gerald Ford. He visited China for 20 days in September of 1976 as a guest of the Chinese government.

[\[7\]](#) Nixon visited China from 21 to 28 February 1976, exactly four years after his first visit as U.S. President in 1972.