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Minutes of Conversation, Mao Zedong and Ambassador Yudin

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Summary:

Mao Zedong held this conversation with Yudin in the context of the emerging dispute between Beijing and Moscow on establishing a Chinese-Soviet joint submarine flotilla.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

- English Translation

After you left yesterday I could not fall asleep, nor did I have dinner. ^[1] Today I invite you over to talk a bit more so that you can be [my] doctor: [after talking with you], I might be able to eat and sleep this afternoon. You are fortunate to have little difficulty in eating and sleeping.

Let us return to the main subject and chat about the issues we discussed yesterday. We will only talk about these issues here in this room! There exists no crisis situation between you and me.

Our relationship can be described as: nine out of ten fingers of yours and ours are quite the same with only one finger differing. I have repeated this point two or three times. You haven't forgotten, have you?

I've thought over and over again of the issues that were discussed yesterday. It is likely that I might have misunderstood you, but it is also possible that I was right. We may work out a solution after discussion or debate. It appears that [we] will have to withdraw [our] navy's request for [obtaining] nuclear-powered submarines [from the Soviet Union]. Barely remembering this matter, I have acquired some information about it only after asking others.^[2] There are some warmhearted people at our navy's headquarters, namely, the Soviet advisers. They asserted that, now that the Soviet nuclear submarines have been developed, we can obtain [them] simply by sending a cable [to Moscow].

Well, your navy's nuclear submarines are of a [top] secret advanced technology. The Chinese people are careless in handling things. If we are provided with them, we might put you to trouble.

The Soviet comrades have won victory for forty years, and are thus rich in experience. It has only been eight years since our victory and we have little experience. You therefore raised the question of joint ownership and operation. The issue of ownership has long before been dealt with: Lenin proposed the system of rent and lease which, however, was targeted at the capitalists.

China has some remnant capitalists, but the state is under the leadership of the Communist Party.

You never trust the Chinese! You only trust the Russians! [To you] the Russians are the first-class [people] whereas the Chinese are among the inferior who are dumb and careless. Therefore [you] came up with the joint ownership and operation proposition. Well, if [you] want joint ownership and operation, how about have them all—let us turn into joint ownership and operation our army, navy, air force, industry, agriculture, culture, education. Can we do this? Or, [you] may have all of China's more than ten thousand kilometers of coastline and let us only maintain a guerrilla force. With a few atomic bombs, you think you are in a position to control us through asking for the right of rent and lease. Other than this, what else [do you have] to justify [your request]?

Lüshun [Port Arthur] and Dalian [Darinsé] were under your control before. You departed from these places later. Why [were these places] under your control? It is because then China was under the Guomindang's rule. Why did you volunteer to leave? It is because the Communist Party had taken control of China.

Because of Stalin's pressure, the Northeast and Xinjiang became [a Soviet] sphere of influence, and four jointly owned and operated enterprises were established.^[3] Comrade Khrushchev later proposed to have these [settlements] eliminated, and we were grateful for that.

You [Russians] have never had faith in the Chinese people, and Stalin was among the worst. The Chinese [Communists] were regarded as Tito the Second; [the Chinese people] were considered as a backward nation. You [Russians] have often stated that the Europeans looked down upon the Russians. I believe that some Russians look down upon the Chinese people.

At the most critical juncture [of the Chinese revolution], Stalin did not allow us to carry out our revolution and opposed our carrying out the revolution. He made a huge mistake on this issue. So did [Grigory Y.] Zinoviev.

Neither were we pleased with [Anastas] Mikoyan. He flaunted his seniority and treated us as if [we were] his sons. He put on airs and looked very arrogant. He assumed the greatest airs when he first visited Xibaipo in 1949^[4] and has been like that every time he came to China. Every time he came, he would urge me to visit Moscow. I asked him what for. He would then say that there was always something for you to do there. Nevertheless, only until later when Comrade Khrushchev proposed to hold a conference to work out a resolution [concerning the relationship among all the communist parties and socialist states] did [I go to Moscow].^[5]

It was our common duty to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Up to that time, as I often pointed out, there had existed no such thing as brotherly relations among all the parties because, [your leaders] merely paid lip service and never meant it; as a result, the relations between [the brotherly] parties can be described as between father and son or between cats and mice. I have raised this issue in my private meetings with Khrushchev and other [Soviet] comrades. They all admitted that such a father-son relationship was not of European but Asian style. Present were Bulganin, Mikoyan, and [M. A.] Suslov. Were you also at the meeting? From the Chinese side, I and Deng Xiaoping were present.

I was unhappy with Mikoyan's congratulation speech which he delivered at our Eighth National Congress and I deliberately refused to attend that day's meeting as a protest. You did not know that many of our deputies were not happy with [Mikoyan's speech]. Acting as if he was the father, he regarded China as Russia's son.

China has her own revolutionary traditions, although China's revolution could not have succeeded without the October Revolution, nor without Marxism-Leninism.

We must learn from the Soviet experiences. We will comply with the commonly accepted principles, especially the nine principles stated in the "Moscow Manifesto."^[6] We ought to learn from all the experiences whether they are correct or erroneous. The erroneous lessons included Stalin's metaphysics and dogmatism. He was not totally metaphysical because he had acquired some dialectics in thinking; but a large part of his [thoughts] focused on metaphysics. What you termed as the cult of personality was one [example of his metaphysics]. Stalin loved to assume the greatest airs.

Although we support the Soviet Union, we won't endorse its mistakes. As for [the differences over] the issue of peaceful evolution, we have never openly discussed [these differences], nor have we published [them] in the newspapers. Cautious as we have been, we choose to exchange different opinions internally. I had discussed them with you before I went to Moscow. While in Moscow, [we assigned] Deng Xiaoping to raise five [controversial] issues. We won't openly talk about them even in the future, because our doing so would hurt Comrade Khrushchev's [political position]. In order to help consolidate his [Khrushchev's] leadership, we decided not to talk about these [controversies], although it does not mean that the justice is not on our side.

With regard to inter-governmental relations, we remain united and unified up to this date which even our adversaries have conceded. We are opposed to any [act] that is harmful to the Soviet Union. We have objected to all the major criticism that the revisionists and imperialists have massed against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has so far done the same thing [for us].

When did the Soviets begin to trust us Chinese? At the time when [we] entered the Korean War. From then on, the two countries got closer to one another [than before] and as a result, the 156 aid projects came about. When Stalin was alive, the [Soviet] aid consisted of 141 projects. Comrade Khrushchev later added a few more.^[7]

We have held no secrets from you. Because more than one thousand of your experts are working in our country, you are fully aware of the state of our military, political, economic, and cultural affairs. We trust your people, because you are from a socialist country, and you are sons and daughters of Lenin.

Problems have existed in our relations, but it was mainly Stalin's responsibility. [We] have had three grievances [against Stalin]. The first concerns the two Wang Ming lines. Wang Ming was Stalin's follower. The second was [Stalin's] discouragement of and opposition to our revolution. Even after the dissolution of the Third International, he still issued orders claiming that, if we did not strike a peace deal with Jiang Jieshi, China would risk a grave danger of national elimination.¹⁹¹ Well, for whatever reason, we are not eliminated. The third was during my first visit to Moscow during which Stalin, [V.M.] Molotov, and [Lavrentij] Beria personally attacked me.

Why did I ask Stalin to send a scholar [to China] to read my works? ¹⁹¹ Was it because I so lacked confidence that I would even have to have you read my works? Or was it because I had nothing to do myself? Not a chance! [My real intention] was to get you over to China to see with your own eyes whether China was truly practicing Marxism or only half-hearted toward Marxism.

Upon your return [to Moscow] you spoke highly of us. Your first comment to Stalin was "the Chinese [comrades] are truly Marxists." Nevertheless Stalin remained doubtful. Only when [we entered] the Korean War did he change his view [about us], and so did East European and other brotherly parties drop their doubts [about us].

It appears that there are reasons for us to be suspect: "First, you opposed Wang Ming; second, you simply insisted on carrying out your revolution regardless of [our] opposition; third, you looked so smart when you went all the way to Moscow desiring Stalin to sign an agreement so that [China] would regain authority over the [Manchurian] railroad." In Moscow it was [I. V.] Kovalev who took care of me with [N. T.] Fedorenko as my interpreter.¹⁹¹ I got so angry that I once pounded on the table. I only had three tasks here [in Moscow], I said to them, the first was to eat, the second was to sleep, and the third was to shit.

There was a [Soviet] adviser in [our] military academy who, in discussing war cases, would only allow [the Chinese trainees] to talk about those of the Soviet Union, not China's, would only allow them to talk about the ten offensives of the Soviet Army, not [ours] in the Korean War.

Please allow us to talk about these cases! [Can you imagine] he wouldn't even allow us to talk about [our own war experiences]! For God's sake, we fought wars for twenty-two years; we fought in Korea for three years! Let [me ask] the Central Military Commission to prepare some materials concerning [our war experiences] and give them to Comrade Yudin, of course, if he is interested.

We did not speak out on some [controversial] issues because we did not want to cause problems in the Sino-Soviet relations. This was particularly true when the Polish Incident broke out. When Poland demanded that all of your specialists go home, Comrade Liu Shaoqi suggested in Moscow that you withdraw some. You accepted [Liu's] suggestion which made the Polish people happy because they then tasted some freedom. At that time we did not raise our problems with your specialists [in China] because, we believe, it would have caused you to be suspicious that we took the advantage [of your crisis situation] to send all the specialists home. We will not send your specialists home; we will not do so even if Poland does so ten more times. We need Soviet aid.

Once I have persuaded the Polish people that [we all] should learn from the Soviet Union, and that after putting the anti-dogmatism campaign at rest, [they] ought to advocate a "learn from the Soviet Union" slogan. Who will benefit in learning from the Soviet Union? The Soviet Union or Poland? Of course, it will benefit Poland more.

Although we shall learn from the Soviet Union, we must first of all take into account our own experiences and mainly rely on our own experiences.

There should be some agreed limits on the terms of [Soviet] specialists. For instance, there have never been restrictions on your chief advisers in [our] military and public security branches, who can come and go without even notifying or consulting with us in advance. Presumably, if you leave your post, is it all right that another ambassador be sent [to China] without discussing it with us?

No, absolutely not! How much information could your advisers to our ministry of public security obtain if they merely sit there totally uninformed by their Chinese colleagues?

Let me advise you [and your specialists] to pay more visits to each of our provinces so as to get in touch with the people and obtain first-hand information. This have I mentioned to Comrade Yudin many times: if not ten thousand times, at least one thousand times!

With some exceptions, though, most of the [Soviet] specialists are of a good quality. We have also made mistakes before: we did not take the initiative to pass on information to the Soviet comrades.

Now we must correct these mistakes by adopting a more active attitude [toward the Soviet comrades]. Next time [we] ought to introduce to them China's general line. If the first time [we] fail to get the information through, [we] will try a second time, third time, and so forth.

Indeed, it was [your] proposition for establishing a "cooperative" on nuclear submarines which led to these remarks. Now that we've decided not to build our nuclear submarines, we are withdrawing our request [for obtaining submarines from the Soviet Union]. Otherwise, we would have to let you have the entire coast, much larger areas than [what you used to control in] Lüshun and Dalian.

Either way, however, we will not get mixed up with you: we must be independent from one another. Since we will in the end build our own flotilla, it is not in our interest that [we] play a minor role in this regard.

Certainly [the arrangements] will be totally different in war time. Your army can operate in our [land], and our army can move to your places to fight. If your army operates on our territory, however, it must be commanded by us. When our army fights in your land, as long as it does not outnumber your army, it has to be directed by you.

These remarks of mine may not sound so pleasing to your ear. You may accuse me of being an nationalist or another Tito. My counter argument is that you have extended Russian nationalism to China's coast.

It was Comrade Khrushchev who had eliminated the four joint enterprises. Before his death, Stalin demanded the right to build a plant to manufacture canned food in our country. My response was that [we] would accept [the demand] as long as you provide us equipment, help us build it, and import all the products [from us]. Comrade Khrushchev praised me for giving [Stalin] a good answer. But why in the world do [you Russians] want to build a naval "cooperative" now? How would you explain to the rest of the world that you propose to build a naval "cooperative"? How would you explain to the Chinese people? For the sake of struggling against the imperialists, you may, as advisers, train the Chinese people. Otherwise, you would have to lease Lüshun and other [ports] for ninety-nine years; but your "cooperative" proposal involves the question of ownership, as you propose that each side will own fifty percent of it. Yesterday you made me so enraged that I could not sleep at all last night. They (pointing at other CCP leaders present) are not angry. Only me alone! If this is wrong, it will be my sole responsibility.

(Zhou Enlai: Our Politburo has unanimously agreed upon these points.)

If we fail to get our messages through this time, we may have to arrange another meeting; if not, we may have to meet every day. Still, I can go to Moscow to speak to Comrade Khrushchev; or we can invite Comrade Khrushchev to come to Beijing so as to clarify every issue.

(Peng Dehuai: This year Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky cabled me requesting to build a long-wave radio station along China's coast to direct the [Soviet] submarine flotilla in the Pacific Ocean.

As the project will cost a total of 110 million rubles, the Soviet Union will cover 70 million and China will pay 40 million.)

This request is of the same nature as the naval "cooperative" proposal which [we] cannot explain to the people. [We] will be put in a politically disadvantageous position if [we] reveal these requests to

the world.

(Peng Dehuai: Petroshevskii [a Soviet military adviser] also has a rude attitude and rough style. He is not very pleased because some of our principles for army building do not completely follow the Soviet military codes. Once at an enlarged CMC meeting, when Comrade Ye Fei from the Fujian Military District¹¹¹ pointed out that, as the Soviet military codes were basically to guide operations on flatlands, and as Fujian [province] had nothing but mountains, the Soviet codes were not entirely applicable [to Fujian's reality]. Very upset at hearing this, Petroshevskii immediately responded: "You have insulted the great military science invented by the great Stalin!" His remarks made everyone at the meeting very nervous.)

Some of the above-mentioned [controversial] issues have been raised [by us] before, some have not. You have greatly aided us but now we are downplaying your [role]; you may feel very bad about it. Our relationship, however, resembles that between professor and student: the professor may make mistakes, do not you agree that the student has to point them out? Pointing out mistakes does not mean that the [student] will drive the professor out. After all the professor is a good one.

You are assisting us to build a navy! Your [people] can serve as advisers. Why would you have to have fifty percent of the ownership? This is a political issue. We plan to build two or three hundred submarines of this kind.

If you insist on attaching political conditions [to our submarine request], we will not satisfy you at all, not even give you a tiny [piece of our] finger. You may inform Comrade Khrushchev that, if [he] still [insists on] these conditions, there is no point for us to talk about this issue. If he accepts our requirement, he may come [to Beijing]; if not, he does not have to come, because there is nothing for us to talk about. Even one tiny condition is unacceptable [for us]!

When this issue is involved, we will refuse to accept your aid for ten thousand years. However, it is still possible for us to cooperate on many other affairs; it is unlikely that we would break up. We will, from beginning to the end, support the Soviet Union, although we may quarrel with each other inside the house.

While I was in Moscow, I once made it clear to Comrade Khrushchev that you did not have to satisfy every one of our requests. Because if you hold back your aid from us, [you] in effect would compel us to work harder [to be self-reliant]; should we get everything from you, we will end up in an disadvantageous position.

It is, however, extremely important for us to cooperate politically. Because, if we undermine your political positions, you will encounter considerable problems; the same is true with us: if you undermine our [political] positions, we will be in trouble.

In wartime, you can utilize all our naval ports, military bases, and other [facilities]. [In return] our [military] can operate in your places including your port or bases at Vladivostok and shall return home when war is over. We may sign an agreement on wartime cooperation in advance which does not have to wait until war breaks out. Such an agreement must contain a stipulation that our [forces] can operate on your territory; even if we might not do so, such a stipulation is required, because it involves the issue of equality. In peacetime, however, such an arrangement cannot be accepted. In peacetime, you are only to help us construct [military] bases and build armed forces.

We would not have accepted [your] proposition for building a naval "cooperative" even it had been during Stalin's time. I quarreled with him in Moscow!

Comrade Khrushchev has established his credibility by having the [previous] "cooperative" projects eliminated. Now that such an issue involving ownership is raised again, we are reminded of Stalin's positions. I might be mistaken, but I must express my opinion.

You explained [to me] yesterday that [your proposition] was based on the consideration that [Russia's coastal] conditions were not as good for nuclear submarines to function fully as China's, thus hamstringing future development of nuclear submarines. You can reach [the Pacific] Ocean from Vladivostok through the Kurile Islands. The condition is very good!

What you said [yesterday] made me very uneasy and displeased. Please report all my comments to Comrade Khrushchev: you must tell him exactly what I have said without any polishing so as to make him uneasy. He has criticized Stalin's [policy] lines but now adopts the same policies as Stalin did.

We will still have controversies. You do not endorse some of our positions; we cannot accept some of your policies. For instance, your [leadership] is not pleased at our policy regarding "internal contradictions among the people," and the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend."

Stalin endorsed the Wang Ming line, causing the losses of our revolutionary strength up to more than ninety percent. At the critical junctures [of our revolution], he wanted to hold us back and opposed our revolution. Even after [we] achieved victory, he remained doubtful about us. At the same time, he boasted that it was because of the direction of his theories that China's [revolution] succeeded. [We] must do away with any superstition about him. Before I die, I am prepared to write an article on what Stalin had done to China, which is to be published in one thousand years.

(Yudin: The Soviet central leadership's attitude toward the policies of the Chinese central leadership is: it is completely up to the Chinese comrades how to resolve the Chinese problems, because it is the Chinese comrades who understand the situation best. Moreover, we maintain that it is hasty and arrogant to judge and assess whether or not the CCP's policies are correct, for the CCP is a great party.)

Well, [we] can only say that we have been basically correct. I myself have committed errors before. Because of my mistakes, [we] had suffered setbacks, of which examples included Changsha, Tucheng, and two other campaigns.^[12] I will be very content if I am refuted as being basically correct, because such an assessment is close to reality.

Whether a [joint] submarine flotilla will be built is a policy issue: only China is in a position to decide whether we should build it with your assistance or it should be "jointly owned." Comrade Khrushchev ought to come to China [to discuss this issue] because I have already visited him [in Moscow].

[We] should by no means have blind faith in [authorities]. For instance, one of your specialists asserted on the basis of a book written by one [of your] academy scholars that our coal from Shanxi [province] cannot be turned into coke. Well, such an assertion has despaired us: we therefore would have no coal which can be turned into coke, for Shanxi has the largest coal deposit!

Comrade Xining [transliteration], a Soviet specialist who helped us build the Yangtze River Bridge [in Wuhan], is a very good comrade. His bridge-building method has never been utilized in your country: [you] never allowed him to try his method, either to build a big or medium or even small sized bridge. When he came here, however, his explanation of his method sounded all right. Since we knew little about it, [we] let him try his method! As a result, his trial achieved a remarkable success which has become a first-rate, world-class scientific invention.

I have never met with Comrade Xining, but I have talked to many cadres who participated in the construction of the Yangtze Bridge. They all told me that Comrade Xining was a very good comrade because he took part in every part of the work, adopted a very pleasant working style, and worked very closely with the Chinese comrades. When the bridge was built, the Chinese comrades had learned a great deal [from him]. Any of you who knows him personally please convey my regards to him.

Please do not create any tensions among the specialists regarding the relations between our two parties and two countries. I never advocate that. Our cooperation has covered a large ground and is by far very satisfactory. You ought to make this point clear to your embassy staff members and your experts so that they will not panic when they hear that Comrade Mao Zedong criticized [Soviet leaders].

I have long before wanted to talk about some of these issues. However, it has not been appropriate to talk about them because the incidents in Poland and Hungary put your [leadership] in political trouble. For instance, we then did not feel it right to talk about the problem concerning the experts [in China].

Even Stalin did improve himself: he let China and the Soviet Union sign the [alliance] treaty, supported [us] during the Korean War, and provided [us] with a total of 141 aid projects. Certainly these achievements did not belong to him but to the entire Soviet central leadership. Nevertheless, we do not want to exaggerate Stalin's mistakes.

^[1] Mao Zedong held this conversation with Yudin in the context of the emerging dispute between Beijing and Moscow on establishing a Chinese-Soviet joint submarine flotilla. Allegedly, in 1957-1958, Soviet military and naval advisors in China repeatedly made suggestions to the Chinese that they should purchase new naval equipment from the Soviet Union. On 28 June 1958, Zhou Enlai wrote to Khrushchev, requesting that the Soviet Union provide technological assistance for China's naval buildup, especially the designs for new-type submarines. On 21 July 1958, Yudin called on Mao Zedong. Invoking Khrushchev's name, Yudin told Mao that the geography of the Soviet Union made it difficult for it to take full advantage of the new-type submarines. Because China had a long coastline and good natural harbors, the Soviets proposed that China and the Soviet Union establish a joint submarine flotilla. Mao Zedong made the following response: "First, we should make clear the guiding principle. [Do you mean that] we should create [the flotilla] with your assistance? Or [do you mean] that we should jointly create [the flotilla], otherwise you will not offer any assistance?" Mao emphasized that he was not interested in creating a Sino-Soviet "military cooperative." (Source: Han Nianlong et al. *Dangdai zhongguo wajiao*, 113-114.) The next day, Mao discussed the proposal with Yudin at length.

^[2] Mao referred to Zhou Enlai and Peng Dehuai who were present during this discussion.

^[3] In March 1950 and July 1951, the Chinese and Soviet government signed four agreements, establishing a civil aviation company, an oil company, a non-ferrous and rare metal company, and a shipbuilding company jointly owned by the two countries.

^[4] Xibaipo was tiny village in Hebei Province where the Chinese Communist Party maintained headquarters from mid 1948 to early 1949. Dispatched by Stalin, Mikoyan secretly visited Xibaipo from 31 January to 7 February 1949 and held extensive meetings with Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders. For a Chinese account of Mikoyan's visit, see Shi Zhe (trans. Chen Jian), "With Mao and Stalin: The Reminiscences of a Chinese Interpreter," *Chinese Historians* 5:1 (Spring 1992), 45-56. For a Russian account of the visit, see Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949," *Far Eastern Affairs (Moscow)* 2 (1995) 72-94. It is interesting and important to note that the Chinese and Russian accounts of this visit are in accord.

^[5] Mao Zedong attended the Moscow conference of leaders of communist and workers' parties from socialist countries in November 1957, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution.

^[6] The "Moscow Manifesto" was adopted by the Moscow conference of leaders of communist and workers' parties from socialist countries in November 1957.

^[7] The 156 aid projects were mainly designed for China's first five-year plan, focusing on energy development, heavy industry and defense industry.

^[8] Here Mao referred to two of Stalin's telegrams to the CCP leadership around 20-22 August 1945, in which Stalin urged the CCP to negotiate a peace with the Guomindang, warning that failing to do so could cause "the danger of national elimination."

^[9] Mao referred to his request to Stalin in 1950 to dispatch a philosopher to China to help edit Mao's works. Stalin then sent Yudin to China, who, before becoming Soviet ambassador to China, was in China from July 1950 to January 1951 and July to October 1951, participating in the editing and translation of Mao Zedong's works.

^[10] I. V. Kovalev, Stalin's representative to China from 1948 to 1950, accompanied Mao Zedong to visit the Soviet Union in December 1949-February 1950; N. T. Fedorenko, a Soviet sinologist, in the early 1950s served as the cultural counselor at the Soviet embassy in Beijing.

^[11] Ye Fei commanded the Fujian Military District.

^[12] Mao commanded these military operations during the CCP-Guomindang civil war in 1927-1934.