

**April 9, 1968**

**Excerpt from Leonid Brezhnev's Speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum, "On the Current Problems of the International Situation and on the Struggle of the CPSU for the Unity of the International Communist Movement"**

**Citation:**

"Excerpt from Leonid Brezhnev's Speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum, "On the Current Problems of the International Situation and on the Struggle of the CPSU for the Unity of the International Communist Movement", April 9, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), fond 2, opis 3, delo 95, listy 50-58. Obtained and translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110507>

**Summary:**

Brezhnev describes the recent development of the Pueblo Incident, which includes the increase in US military deployment to the East and intentions of DPRK and USSR to strengthen ties.

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

9 April 1968

[...] In international life during the last several months, events in the Far East draw [particular] attention in connection with the incursion in the Korean [territorial] waters of an American military vessel Pueblo. Despite the limited scale of these events, they had principal importance, both from the point of view of rebuffing the aggressive actions of the USA and in terms of our attitude towards certain peculiarities of the policy of the Korean friends. The Politburo has reported many times to the CC Plenum regarding our line in relations with the KWP and the DPRK. The essence of this line is to consistently strengthen friendly relations with the KWP and the DPRK despite the existence of different approaches between us and the Korean comrades on a series of questions of the international communist movement and other [problems].

On the whole, the situation in the course of the entire preceding [in the text, mistakenly, "subsequent"] period developed precisely along these lines. We developed contacts with the Koreans in various spheres and above all in the economic [sphere]. Trade was developing; we concluded a series of agreements on co-operation in timber clearing, on building an oil refinery, etc. We continued to provide aid in defending the DPRK. The Korean press stopped publishing unfriendly statements addressed to the CPSU and the Soviet Union.

One should remark in particular that during his meetings with us, comrade Kim Il Sung assured [us] that the [Korean] friends did not intend to solve the problem of uniting North and South Korea by military means, and in this connection [did not intend] to unleash a war with the Americans, whose forces, as is known, are stationed in South Korea.

However, several indications appeared recently that, seemingly, suggested that the leaders of the DPRK have begun to take a more militant road. This became particularly noticeable at the time of the incident with the American vessel Pueblo.

You know, comrades, the factual side of things. I am talking about the incursion of the American military vessel Pueblo into Korean territorial waters. On 23 January of this year this vessel was detained by DPRK naval forces (as the friends assert, detained in their territorial waters) and, after a firefight, taken to a port, where it came under arrest. One should say that the measures taken in this case by the government of the DPRK appear unusually harsh: as a rule in the practice of international relations, in case of an incursion by a foreign military vessel into the territorial waters of any state, it is simply advised to leave these waters or forced to do so.

Washington's reaction was fierce, rude and aggressive. The government of the USA made accusations and threats addressed to the DPRK; considerable naval forces and air forces were deployed near North Korea's shores, including the flag carrier of the 7th Fleet, the atomic aircraft carrier "Enterprise." Calls for the bombardment of Korean ports, forced return of Pueblo, etc. were heard in the USA. The Americans clearly counted on forcing the DPRK's retreat before the cannon barrels of their ships. Besides this, President Johnson used this incident to further increase military preparations and heat up military hysteria on an international scale. New categories of reserves were mobilized into the US army, demonstrative measures were taken to increase military preparedness in Europe.

Under these circumstances, the CC CPSU and the Soviet government found it necessary to voice public support for the DPRK, a socialist country, with which we are moreover bound by a treaty of friendship and mutual help. We did it, supporting the right of the DPRK to defend its security and censuring the aggressive behavior of the USA.

Besides this, the Politburo and the Soviet government considered it useful to exert direct pressure on the leadership of the USA in order to lessen its urge and desire to inflame provocations in the immediate proximity of the borders of the USSR and in relation to countries allied with us. In this connection, a decision was made to send a communication to President Johnson on behalf of the Soviet government.

The 3 February [1968] letter to Johnson drew attention to the fact that the USA is conducting a concentration of military fleet and aviation on an unprecedented scale in the immediate proximity of the Far Eastern regions of the Soviet Union. The American President was told, "in our actions we must take into consideration what is happening near our borders that touches on the security interests of the Soviet Union." At the same time it was stressed that efforts to act with regard to the DPRK by means of threats and pressure can only lead to a dead end and to further complications, fraught with far reaching consequences.

At the same time, we took certain measures to increase the military preparedness of the Soviet military forces in the Far East in order to protect the country in case of complications and to let the Americans understand that we are not joking, but approach this matter seriously. The adopted measures worked. On 6 February [1968] Johnson sent a reply in which he tried to explain the amassing of US military forces in the Sea of Japan area by reference to militant statements and actions of the DPRK, and assured us that a "prompt settlement [of the crisis] serves our common interests." The President's message said in the end that he "gave an order to stop any further amassing of our naval and air forces at the present time" and decreed that they will pull out one of the aircraft carriers with accompanying vessels from the region of the incident. Indeed, the aircraft carrier "Enterprise" was pulled out from the DPRK's shores.

At the same time we insistently advised the Korean comrades, with whom we maintained systematic contact throughout this period, to show reserve, not to give the Americans an excuse to widen provocations, to settle the incident by political means. When it became clear to the entire world that the attempts of the USA to make the DPRK retreat before blackmail and military threats had failed, when the government of the USA was forced to conduct talks with the representatives of the DPRK in Panmunjom regarding Pueblo, we expressed an opinion to the Korean leadership that now, without any harm and even with political advantage for the DPRK, one could finish this affair by disgraceful deportation of the crew of the USA spy vessel from the territory of North Korea.

But the Korean comrades maintained a fairly extreme position and did not show any inclination towards settling the incident. DPRK propaganda took on a fairly militant character, the population was told that a war could begin any day, that the military forces of the DPRK are "ready to smash American imperialism." In effect, a full mobilization was declared in the country; life, especially in the cities, was changed in a military fashion; there began an evacuation of the population, administrative institutions, industries, and factories of Pyongyang.

At the same time the leadership of the DPRK took one more step that alarmed us. On 31 January [1968] Kim Il Sung addressed an official letter to comrade Kosygin as head of the USSR Council of Ministers. This letter said that "Johnson's clique could at any time engage in a military adventure in Korea," that the policy of the American imperialists "is a rude challenge to the DPRK and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, who are bound together by allied relations according to the treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual help between the DPRK and the USSR; [it is] a serious threat to the security of all socialist countries and to peace in the entire world".

This message further officially informed the Soviet government on behalf of the

government of the DPRK that they are "forced to conduct preparations to give the aggression an appropriate rebuff" and [the letter] expressed confidence that "in case of the creation of a state of war in Korea as a result of a military attack by the American imperialists, the Soviet government and the fraternal Soviet people will fight together with us against the aggressors..."

Kim Il Sung's letter ended with a proposal: in case such situation materialized, "[you should] provide us without delay with military and other aid and support, to mobilize all means available."

Matters took a serious turn.

An official communication along government lines, bypassing comradely consultations along party lines that are usual in such cases, spoke to the intention [of the Korean leadership] to bind the Soviet Union somehow, using the existence of the treaty between the USSR and the DPRK [as a pretext to] involve us in supporting such plans of the Koreans friends about which we knew nothing. The CC Politburo believed that the time had come to state our attitude clearly to the Korean comrades regarding these questions and certain peculiarities of their policies that concern our country.

Without giving an official reply to Kim Il Sung's message, we addressed a communication to him to come to Moscow for a comprehensive exchange of opinions regarding the situation which has emerged. Comrade Kim Il Sung replied that at the present time circumstances do not permit him to leave the country. Member of the KWP CC Politburo, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Kim Ch'ang Bong was [instead] dispatched to Moscow for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Army.

On the Politburo's instructions I received Kim Ch'ang Bong on 26 February [1968] and had a long discussion with him, in the course of which [I] expressed in all earnestness our position on a series of important questions.

He was told that we still base ourselves on the assumption that the Korean comrades maintain a course of peaceful unification of Korea, for we are not aware of [any] changes [to this course]. In any case, under the current circumstances we are against taking the matter towards unleashing a war, though we fully understand the desire of the DPRK to strengthen its own defense and we actively support this. We do not understand the meaning of the information that reached us regarding the evacuation of Pyongyang. We have no information from [our Korean] friends regarding their talks with the Americans, and regarding the aims that these talks pursue.

As far as the question of the Soviet-Korean treaty and Kim Il Sung's letter regarding this question are concerned, Kim Ch'ang Bong was told literally the following: "We indeed have a treaty. Its essence is known to both you and us. We would like to stress that it has a defensive character and is an instrument of defending the peace-loving position of North Korea. Since comrade Kim Il Sung did not put the circumstances and the details of the current situation in a concrete form, we consider it very important to conduct serious consultations with him on this question. The problem of military actions is a very difficult question, especially under the current circumstances, when the entire world struggles against war. It is impossible to talk about a military situation, much less about some kind of military actions, by means of short letters. This is a very serious question and it demands serious consultations."

At the same time, an opinion was expressed again that the question of the Pueblo crew, this whole incident, should be settled by political means without much delay, because otherwise the DPRK could lose the serious political gain obtained at the early

stage of the incident.

There are reasons to think that the measures taken by the Politburo have born fruit. In any case, one could note the following facts:

1. Soon after the conversation with Kim Ch'ang Bong, the DPRK Foreign Ministry published a statement that stressed: "the government of the DPRK, both now and in the past, has not changed its policy directed at the preservation of peace in Korea and the peaceful solution of the question of the unification of Korea."
2. The Koreans informed our ambassador regarding the progress of talks with the Americans. One should say that these talks have taken on a fairly protracted character. The Koreans are demanding official apologies from the USA, the Americans are offering various compromises, but an agreement has not yet been reached.
3. The Korean comrades made it known to the United States through neutral countries that they are prepared to exchange the Pueblo crew for patriots arrested in South Korea, and that in this case they will not demand apologies from the USA.
4. On 1 March [1968] Kim Il Sung invited the ambassador of the USSR and asked him to pass to Moscow his gratitude for the conversation with Kim Ch'ang Bong, for the sincere exposition of the opinion of the CC CPSU. At the same time Kim Il Sung assured him that the evacuation activities conducted in Pyongyang did not have an emergency character, that measures have been taken to stop panicky rumors, and corrections are being made to the statements of the DPRK press. In conclusion, Kim Il Sung said: "we have no intention of raising military hysteria." Indeed, the tone of the Korean press has recently become calmer.
5. There is also information that the local authorities in the DPRK have been instructed not to overdo various kinds of mobilization-related activities: evacuation of people, industries and factories. "War is not a question of tomorrow," Kim Il Sung declared at one of the closed meetings in Pyongyang at the beginning of March.

This is how the incident with the vessel Pueblo is developing. It [the incident], as one knows, is not yet finished, and the situation might deteriorate again. However, the atmosphere has relaxed somewhat, the passions on the Korean and on the American side have calmed down. On the whole one might say that by pursuing in this affair our consistent [and] principled line, we managed, first of all, to chip away at the American arrogance [sbit spes], to rebuff their blackmail and threats and, secondly, to exert considerable dissuading influence on the leadership of the DPRK, especially in connection with the question of the treaty, which has important meaning for the state interests of the Soviet Union. [...]