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Report on the Incident involving the Cuban Ambassador and the Delegation of Physicians from Cuba while in North Korea

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Summary:

A report on an incident involving the Cuban Ambassador and the delegation of physicians from Cuba while in North Korea.

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German

Contents:

Translation - English

GDR Embassy in the DPRK
Pyongyang, 2 April 1965

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Subject: Incident with the Cuban ambassador and the delegation of physicians from Cuba

On 28 March, there was a serious incident at 6:00 p.m. while the Cuban ambassador, his family, and a delegation of physicians from Cuba were touring the city. The Cuban physicians wanted to photograph three columns of a destroyed building that was in an area of new construction and that dated from the war against the US. A Korean passerby called to Korean residents in the vicinity to act against the Cuban delegation. A large crowd of people gathered quickly, including 100 children, and the crowd pounded the car with their fists, ordered the occupants to get out, and hurled insults, especially against the Cuban ambassador as a black man. It should be added that the Cuban ambassador is currently the only ambassador who has a relatively good basic knowledge of the Korean language and can take part in simple conversations in Korean. Although the Cuban ambassador identified himself as the ambassador of Cuba, both in Korean and in Russian, this had no effect on the crowd's actions.

The militia in the vicinity took no action at all.

The Cuban physicians urged the ambassador to open the car to get out. Once the Cuban ambassador exited the car, the delegation's cameras were taken away from them. At about this time a member of the security service arrived, and when he realized what was going on, he put his hands in front of his face, and, as the Cuban ambassador said, groaned. The Cuban ambassador told me that he believed that this security service member in part recognized the seriousness of what had happened. This member of the security service apparently called an armed security service unit for assistance. As the unit's troops arrived, they proceeded to exercise extraordinary brutality against the crowd, including the children. They struck these people, including the children, with the butts of their weapons. Once the crowd had been driven away from the car, the Cuban ambassador established that the Cuban flag had been torn off and was no longer there. He asked the leader of the security troops to return the flag. Then the security service troops committed even worse acts of brutality against the people in the street and in the nearby houses, demanding that the flag be returned. The Cuban ambassador remarked to me that their actions were so brutal that if he had been Korean and had had the flag, he would have preferred to eat it rather than to give it back.

The Cuban ambassador then proceeded to the Foreign Ministry, where he met first with the department director, then with Deputy Foreign Minister Heo Dam [Ho Tam] and acting Foreign Minister Kim Yeong-nam [Kim Yong Nam]. According to the Cuban ambassador, the meeting did not end until 3:00 a.m. The Cuban ambassador told me that during this meeting he said that this incident was the result of incorrect political education in the DPRK. He furthermore asserted that during this long meeting he expressed his opinion on all issues related to the behavior of our Korean comrades with respect to foreigners and on issues of internal development (apart from questions about the cult of personality).

The main issue in this meeting was the issue of how this incident should be handled. The Cuban ambassador said that there were two ways to handle the incident. At the state level or at the Party level. The Korean side had to decide how it wanted to handle the incident. He said he was not in communication with Cuba and was thus

acting on his own. However, if the decision was made to deal with this at the state level, he would be forced to take the next plane to Moscow and would not be able to return until the incident had been resolved.

He said that after lengthy discussion our Korean comrades agreed to deal with it at the Party level. The Cuban ambassador then asked to speak with Kim Il Sung. Kim Yeong-nam, acting Foreign Minister tried to prevent this at all costs. He proposed to the Cuban ambassador that he speak to Foreign Minister [illegible] in the hospital, since he was also a candidate for the Politburo. Finally, after the Cuban ambassador could not be dissuaded from his request, Kim Yeong-nam agreed to convey the request to Kim Il Sung.

Kim Il Sung received the ambassador two days later. He said that he asked for understanding that this meeting had to be brief. This was not because of the incident, but because he was very busy. He asked the ambassador to express his regret for the incident to Fidel Castro and the Cuban leadership, and made assurances that the guilty parties would be punished and measures would be taken to prevent similar incidents in the future. He furthermore said that his deputy, Ri Hyo-sun [Ri Hyo Sun], was authorized to see to all of the details involved with handling the incident.

Ri Hyo-sun received the Cuban ambassador on the same day for a four-hour meeting. The meeting took place in the building in which the work for South Korea is performed. As they entered these spaces, Ri Hyo-sun told him that no ambassador had ever entered this house outside of Pyongyang. [Apparently a gesture meant to impress the Cuban ambassador..] First Ri Hyo-sun lectured for nearly an hour, stating among other things that the leadership of the Party in the DPRK was at a very low level. He said the cadre do not understand how to perform true political and ideological education, they command the masses and work with instructions and orders. The level of training of the masses is extremely low. They cannot differentiate between friends and foes. They completely misinterpret our call for revolutionary vigilance. All of the militia members who were involved in the incident have been arrested, as well as the members of the Party's district leadership and the Party cadre of the street committee. The Party secretaries of the district committee were also arrested; they were not in Pyongyang during the incident. Those arrested will be held until the investigation has concluded. The Cuban ambassador will be informed of the results. He said Kim Il Sung had also authorized him to hold meetings with the Party cadre in Pyongyang, and that officials from the Foreign Ministry would address issues of behavior toward foreigners at these meetings.

During this meeting, Ri Hyo-sun is also said to have made the following remarks about the issue of differences in views: The leadership of the Korean Workers Party is in complete agreement with Fidel Castro's speech. The DPRK would also like to take the same stance on issues of differences in views as the Cuban leadership. This is not possible at present. We will also not publish Soviet or Chinese articles in the future. We will make our own opinion on these issues known if it becomes necessary. But this will be a neutral stance-neither for the one side nor the other. Our actions will be reserved.

Remarks:

The incident is indicative of the difficult internal situation and of how little influence the leadership really has on the Korean masses. The incident transpired on the day on which approx. 10% of the residents of Pyongyang participated in a major rally against the Japanese/South Korean negotiations. And approx. 8 days after a similar rally in support of Vietnam, in which the Revolutionary Forces of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were at the center of the agitprop. The Cuban flag had to be familiar to many people from the agitprop. The Cuban ambassador has been in Korea for approx. 3 years, his picture has been published in the press many times.

The remarks by Ri Hyo-sun on not publishing Chinese and Soviet articles in the future appear credible.

We believe the Cuban ambassador has provided a faithful account of the incident. We have a particularly close relationship to the Cuban ambassador and were the only embassy that was immediately informed about the incident. The Soviet embassy was not told about it for 8 days. My wife also has a very close relationship to the Cuban ambassador's wife, to whom she provides weekly German lessons, and who described the events in the same manner. Witnessing the brutality the security services used against adults and children brought the wife of the Cuban ambassador to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

Horst Brie

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