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Excerpts from the Meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping

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Summary:

The Chinese version of the record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping. Deng provides a historical overview of China's relations with the Soviet Union and other countries.

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Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Deng Xiaoping: The Chinese people sincerely hope that Sino-Soviet relations will improve. I suggest that we take this opportunity to declare that henceforth our relations will return to normal.

For many years there has been a question of how to understand Marxism and socialism. From the first Moscow talks in 1957 [among delegations from the Soviet Union, China and Hungary] through the first half of the 1960s, bitter disputes went on between our two parties. I was one of the persons involved and played no small role in those disputes. Now, looking back on more than 20 years of practice, we can see that there was a lot of empty talk on both sides. Nobody was clear about exactly what changes had taken place over the century since Marx's death or about how to understand and develop Marxism in light of those changes. We cannot expect Marx to provide ready answers to questions that arise a hundred or several hundred years after his death, nor can we ask Lenin to give answers to questions that arise fifty or a hundred years after his death. A true Marxist-Leninist must understand, carry on and develop Marxism-Leninism in light of the current situation.

The world changes every day, and modern science and technology in particular develop rapidly. A year today is the equivalent of several decades, a century or even a longer period in ancient times. Anyone who fails to carry Marxism forward with new thinking and a new viewpoint is not a true Marxist. Lenin was a true and great Marxist because it was not books that enabled him to find the revolutionary road and to accomplish the October socialist revolution in backward Russia but realities, logic, philosophical thinking and communist ideals. It was not by reading the works of Marx and Lenin that the great Marxist-Leninist Mao Zedong learned how to accomplish the new-democratic revolution in backward China. Could Marx predict that the October Revolution would take place in backward Russia? Could Lenin foresee that the Chinese revolutionaries would win by encircling the cities from the countryside? Then, the question was how to make revolution. But the same is true when the question is how to build up a country. After a successful revolution each country must build socialism according to its own conditions. There are not and cannot be fixed models. Sticking to conventions can only lead to backwardness or even failure.

The purpose of our meeting is to put the past behind us and open up a new era. By putting the past behind us I mean ceasing to talk about it and focusing on the future. However, I am afraid it is no good for us just to keep silent about the past. We have to make our views clear. I should like to tell you what the Chinese people and the Chinese Party think about the past. You don't have to respond to these views or debate them. Let each of us talk about our own. That will help us advance on a more solid basis. I shall only mention two things in brief. First, how China suffered from the oppression of the big powers before liberation; second, where, as the Chinese see it, the threats have come from in recent decades—specifically, during the last 30 years.

About the first question. Starting from the Opium War, because of the corruption of the Qing Dynasty, China was subjected to aggression and enslavement by foreign powers and reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal status. Altogether, about a dozen powers bullied China, chief among them being Britain. And before Britain, Portugal had compelled China to lease its territory of Macao. The countries that took greatest advantage of China were Japan and czarist Russia -- and at certain times and concerning certain questions, the Soviet Union.

At various times Japan occupied many parts of our country; for 50 years it occupied Taiwan. It carved spheres of influence out of China. In the North in particular, there were Japanese concessions in many big cities. In 1931 Japan started a war of aggression against China, and in 1932 it set up the Manchukuo regime in the Northeast. In 1937 it launched a full-scale war that lasted for eight years. Thanks to China's resistance, to the joint struggle waged by the antifascist Allies and to the dispatch of Soviet troops to the Northeast, in the end Japan was totally defeated.

Japan had inflicted untold damage upon China. Tens of millions of Chinese had died in the war, not to mention other losses. If we were to settle historical accounts, it would be Japan that would owe China the most. Since Japan was defeated, China recovered all the places that had been occupied. The only outstanding issue is Senkaku Shoto [Diaoyu Island], a small and uninhabited island. When I visited Japan, reporters asked me about it. I replied that the problem could be shelved and that if our generation could not solve it, the next generation would be wiser and would eventually find a way to do so. To settle similar disputes, we proposed later that such places be exploited jointly. The other country that took greatest advantage of China was czarist Russia and later the Soviet Union. Through unequal treaties, Russia seized more than 1.5 million square kilometres of Chinese territory. China was also encroached upon after the October Revolution. For instance, in 1929 the Soviet Union seized the Heixiazi Islands. When victory in the Second World War was in sight the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union signed in Yalta a secret agreement dividing up spheres of influence among them, greatly to the detriment of China's interests. That was the period under Stalin. At that time, the

Kuomintang [Guomindang] government signed a pact with the Soviet Union recognizing the arrangements of the Yalta agreement.

After the People's Republic of China was founded, it signed a new treaty with the Soviet Union. It established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of Mongolia and reached an agreement on the boundaries between the two countries. Later, China held negotiations on borders with the Soviet Union, asking the Soviet Union to recognize the historical fact that the treaties between czarist Russia and the Qing Dynasty rulers were unequal and had permitted Russia to encroach upon Chinese territory.

Nevertheless, since more than 1.5 million square kilometres were seized under the treaties, and in view of past and present realities, we are still willing to settle border disputes on the basis of those treaties. That was the first question. Spelling out our views may help solve problems left over by history and clarify what I mean by opening up a new era. So it was worth mentioning.

Now about the second question. Where have the threats come from in recent decades? Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the Chinese revolution triumphed, and the People's Republic was founded. China did not invade other countries and posed no threat to them, but other countries threatened China. Our country was poor and weak but independent. Where did the major threats come from? As soon as it was founded, the PRC was confronted with this question. At that time, the threat came from the United States.

Glaring examples were the Korean War and then the Vietnam War. In the first, China sent volunteers to fight the United States. The Soviet Union supplied us with arms but asked us to pay for them, albeit at half price. In the following years Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, and China was beset with economic difficulties. But no matter how serious our difficulties were, we were determined to pay that bill, and we paid it two years ahead of time.

In the 1960s the Soviet Union strengthened its military presence all along the borders between China and the Soviet Union and Mongolia. The number of missiles was increased to one third of the Soviet Union's total, and troops were increased to one million, including those sent to Mongolia. Where was the threat coming from? Naturally, China drew its conclusions. In 1963 I led a delegation to Moscow. The negotiations broke down. I should say that starting from the mid-1960s, our relations deteriorated to the point where they were practically broken off. I don't mean it was because of the ideological disputes; we no longer think that everything we said at that time was right. The basic problem was that the Chinese were not treated as

equals and felt humiliated. However, we have never forgotten that in the period of our First Five-Year Plan the Soviet Union helped us lay an industrial foundation.

If I have talked about these questions at length, it is in order to put the past behind us. We want the Soviet comrades to understand our view of the past and to know what was on our minds then. Now that we have reviewed the history, we should forget about it. That is one thing that has already been achieved by our meeting. Now that I have said what I had to say, that's the end of it. The past is past. More contacts are being made between our two countries. After bilateral relations are normalized, our exchanges will increase in depth and scope. I have an important suggestion to make in this regard: we should do more practical things and indulge in less empty talk.

There is only one thing I shall have left undone in my lifetime: the resolution of the Taiwan question. I'm afraid I shall not live to see it. In foreign affairs, I have participated in accomplishing the following: we have readjusted our relations with Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union, and we have decided to recover Hong Kong and have reached an agreement with Britain in that regard. In domestic affairs, I have participated in defining the Party's basic line, deciding to concentrate on modernization, adopting the policies of reform and opening China to the rest of the world and upholding the Four Cardinal Principles. What I have not accomplished is to abolish the system of life tenure in office; that is an important problem concerning the system of leadership.