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The Manchurian Incident and the Soviet Reserves Policies⁽¹⁾

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Foreword : Stalin's Reaction to the Manchurian Incident

There is a high possibility that the intensification of reserve policy in the early 1930's in the Soviet Union was propelled by the Manchurian Incident, a critical international factor to the Soviet Union. In this paper I want to briefly summarize those reserves policies.

I.V.Stalin's reaction to the Manchurian Incident is clearly expressed in the letter he wrote to Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, on November the 27th, 1931, about 2 months after the outbreak of the Incident⁽²⁾. Though I won't quote this letter here, we can know in full the extent to, which Stalin paid attention to Japanese actions. And it should also be noticed that Stalin bore in mind Poland's activities of intervening in Western Russia after the October Revolution while paying attention to Japanese activities. It is also clear from Stalin's utterance in his letter that the Soviet government succeeded in dragging Patek, the Polish representative in Soviet Union, to Non-Agression Pact negotiations⁽³⁾. Stalin himself had control over information about the Far East and Japan⁽⁴⁾, and on November 16, 1931, the Politburo decided to set up a commission to discuss international problems, with Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich as members (in the end of December Ordzhonikidze also took part in it)⁽⁵⁾. From the Politburo protocols we know that each time problems concerning Japan occurred after the Manchurian Incident, several members including Stalin were called up and the problems were entrusted to them for

discussion. Although the Soviet government requested that the Far Eastern regional committees treat Japanese prudently as not to give Japan an excuse for intervention, it also gradually intensified keeping watch over Japanese. The objects of caution were not limited to Japanese.⁽⁶⁾

Soviet attention was paid not only to Japan, but also to Mongolia, which adjoins Manchuria, and the western region of China, Xinjiang⁽⁷⁾. The Soviet government demanded that the Mongolian leadership change its policies in order to suppress a rebellion spreading from the spring of 1932. The Mongolian leadership was exchanged and the "New Course" policies were introduced. Stalin was of course in the center of this political change in Mongolia. Considering the slow change of the course of Mongolian politics, Stalin, during his summer vacation, wrote to Kaganovich on June 4, 1932, and sought for the expulsion of leftists from Mongolian leadership and a fundamental exchange of policies⁽⁸⁾. In a letter of June 12, 1932, to Voroshilov, Stalin wrote,

"If the political course in Mongolia can change more or less normally, Mongolia will keep its independence, but if not, no amount of "military action" will help Mongolia from becoming the prey of Japan-Manchuria."⁽⁹⁾

After the adoption of the new policies by Mongolian leadership, Stalin wrote to Voroshilov with satisfaction⁽¹⁰⁾. Though the greatest matter of concern for the Soviet Government was the reinforcement of defenses in the Far East as Stalin wrote, fearing the simultaneous attack from east and west, the formation of long front line in Siberia by the collapse of Mongolian People's Republic as mentioned above, the Soviet Union started nationwide preparations for a war. One example of those preparations to which I want to inquire into is the Soviet reserves policies, which began to be paid serious attention, in my opinion, after the Manchurian Incident.

The Setup of a Reserves Commission and the Formation of Reserves

It was the Politburo session of October 10, 1931, that decided the setup a Reserves Commission under the Soviet of Labor and Defense⁽¹¹⁾. Molotov, Mikoyan and others were entrusted to select goods, which should be transferred in to the superintendence of the Reserves Commission⁽¹²⁾.

On October 15, 1931, Yagoda from OGPU was confirmed to be the first chairman of this commission⁽¹³⁾, but on October 20, this resolution was changed and Kuibyshev (the deputy chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars) was selected as a

chairman and three deputies, including Yagoda, were elected⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the Politburo session of November 15, 1931, the goods to be transferred in to the superintendent of the Reserves Commission were reported and a decree plan about reserves presented by Kuibyshev was confirmed⁽¹⁵⁾. In this decree were decided the quantities and time limit of various goods. Cotton textiles, silk textiles, leather shoes, soap, makhorka, cigarettes, salt, sugar, can and matches were included in the list⁽¹⁶⁾.

The People's Commissariat of Supply, the People's Commissariat for External Trade and Supreme Soviet of National Economy(VSNKh) as well as other political mechanisms were to allot and hand over warehouses for storage and personnel to the Reserves Commission. In the regions under the plenipotentiary of each state, organizations responsible for the formation and watch of *fond* were set up. The Reserves Commission was obligated to report the conditions of *fond* regularly to the Politburo⁽¹⁷⁾. Among the 68 goods of "Import Special Reserves", which were planned to be founded by imports, were included many precious metals and Western technical goods not produced in the Soviet Union⁽¹⁸⁾. There were 28 goods, including sugar, tea, meat, soap, match wire and newspaper among the mobilization *fond* planned to be set up by the People's Commissariat of Supply⁽¹⁹⁾.

We can know the reason for the establishment of the Reserves Commission from the report given by Kuibyshev on February 2, 1933, at the conference of the Reserves Commission. At that time he said, that the Reserves Commission was set up by "the initiative of Stalin". Firstly, he ascribed the Party's policies of reserves formation to the fact that the Soviet Union was constructing socialism within a context where it was surrounded by capitalism and weighed down with the threat of invasion and one of the fundamental factors for the reinforcement of national defense was the formation of reserves. Secondly, Kuibyshev considered the reserves to be necessary for the smooth management of the economy and he listed up grain, feed, fuel, metals and industrial goods as reserves as well as hard currency⁽²⁰⁾.

The real operation of reserve goods can be to some extent also grasped from the Politburo protocols. For example, many resolutions to admit using metals listed up in the "imported special reserves" by organizations concerned were adopted on condition that these metals be recovered in quantity later⁽²¹⁾. It seems that a lot of applications to receive materials from the reserves and to delay the date for the return of reserve goods were made just after the founding of the Reserves Commission. In January, 1932, the Politburo prohibited any petitions for the reception of reserves goods by organizations concerned and it determined punishments for the illegal

reception of reserves goods⁽²²⁾.

Reserves of Hard Currency, the Curtailment of Expenditure and the Gold Industry

I have already referred to the fact that Kuibyshev included hard currency amongst materials to be reserved. For the Soviet Union, which was undergoing industrialization and inferior to advanced capitalistic countries in the sphere of military technology, the relations with capitalistic countries were important in order to obtain licenses and to purchase military goods and equipment. For these purposes hard currency was very much needed.

On May 27, 1932, the Politburo decided to set up a Politburo Commission regarding hard currency reserves with Kaganovich as the chairman and with fourteen members including Stalin and Molotov. This commission was entrusted to consider the perspectives of hard currency through 1932-1933⁽²³⁾. The Politburo session of June , based on the consideration of this commission, decided to curtail the expenditure of hard currency relating to chartering and foreign technical assistance.⁽²⁴⁾

But the measures to curtail hard currency expenditure on imports were already being adopted from 1931. On October 25, 1931, almost simultaneously with the founding of the Reserves Commission, the Politburo decided in the resolution "About the allotments for the Supreme Soviet of National Economy on imported equipment" the necessity to reconsider other Politburo decrees from the standpoint of the maximum curtailment of imports, considering that the conditions for external trade had changed completely. The commission including Kuibyshev, Ordzhonikidze was entrusted to fix the quantity of indispensable goods⁽²⁵⁾. The change of conditions for external trade in this resolution can not be associated with anything other than the Manchurian Incident. This resolution should be considered to be a decision arising from a desire to escape from external dependence as early as possible and a desire to use hard currency for import as effectively as possible.

At the same time, on November 27, 1931, the Soviet of People's Commissars decided to build up a reserve of 350 million rubles during the fourth quarters of 1931 and 1932⁽²⁶⁾. It was necessary to curtail expenditure as much as possible to build up these reserves. Keeping in step with these demands, on March 31, 1932, a directive signed by Stalin and Molotov was issued about expenditure restraint, reassigning fiscal reserves and finances as much as possible to industry and defense⁽²⁷⁾.

Meanwhile, attention was also paid to methods of obtaining hard currency. Gold was important in this point. On November 5, 1931, the Politburo adopted "the decree about the gold industry" and the heading of this decree stated that "the Soviet domestic situation, and more importantly the international situation pushed up the gold industry to hold one of the leading positions in the national economy, and much more demand is paid to it". This decree also listed several measures to enlarge production of gold⁽²⁸⁾. This resolution must be considered to be a set with the resolution about curtailment of hard currency for imported goods mentioned above. It is very interesting that the changes in the international situation, namely the Manchurian Incident, encouraged an increment in gold production as did the curtailment of hard currency expenditure.

Food Reserves

Food products were no less important to the Soviet Union than reserves of metals, various goods, fuel and the like. The fact that the Soviet Union was in a difficult situation due to a nationwide food shortage especially during 1932-1933 draws our attention as to what conditions under. Though I can't provide a clear answer as to the relationship between food shortages and reserves, I would like to briefly mention government measures. In the Politburo protocols are included documents containing requests from regions for food assistance and government reactions to them. For example, several resolutions concerning the cancellation of food reserves were adopted from June, 1932⁽²⁹⁾. On July 16, 1932, a directive entitled "About the foundation of Gosfond(Gosudarstvennyi fond = state fond) and Nefond(Neprikosvennyi fond= untouchable fond) on the grain and feed during 1932-33" was decided upon and the plan to make Gosfond 55 millions puds(one pud = 16.38kg) and Nefond 120 millions pud was approved⁽³⁰⁾. On August 25, 1932, the resolution about the deployment of special reserves was confirmed by the Politburo⁽³¹⁾. In the Politburo session on September 1 Kuibyshev summarized the activities almost 1 year of his Reserves Commission about food reserves and concluded that the OGPU and the Reserves Commission had succeeded in their activities to set up reserves⁽³²⁾.

The food shortage in the Soviet Union is said to have been the most serious during the winter from 1932 to 1933. The Ukraine was effected more than any other region by famine and in the collected documents about famine are included documents on the formidable situation at that time there⁽³³⁾. Although in these collected documents are recorded food aids from the center and requests by Ukrainian leadership to release

food reserves, the measure interest of Stalin's leadership was still in grain procurement⁽³⁴⁾. But for two months from May to July, 1933, the Politburo decided to release grain and feed reserves five times, 15 millions puds each time and 75 millions puds in all⁽³⁵⁾. Considering the tragic circumstances surrounding the famine, it is apparent that the quantity of released food was insufficient. However, it was a famine which came about during a time when the government was promoting reserves and the problem left to consider is whether the reserves were completely exhausted or whether any food reserves remained within the domestic context of many people starving to death.

Conclusion

Above, I briefly summarised the activities of the Reserves Commission which is thought to have been established as a reaction to the Manchurian Incident. If the archival documents relating to Reserves continue to be made open to the public in the future we can expect research to be undertaken relating to the internal structure of the Reserves Commission, the arrangement of reserves (particularly food reserves), the activities of the Reserves Commission in regional areas and the process of activities of the Reserves Commission up until the second World War.

NOTES

RTsKhIDNI(Rossiskii Tsentri Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii)= Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Modern History

GARF(Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii)= State Archives of the Russian Federation

1. My report at the symposium was already published, Kyosuke Terayama, "Otvét na ugrozu : Sovetskii Dal'nii Vostok v nachale 30-kh gg.(in Russian, Answer to the Threat : Soviet Far East in the beginning of 1930s)", *Eko*, Novosibirsk, no.8, 1997, pp.155-160. About the Soviet reserves policies see in detail, Kyosuke Terayama, "Manshu Jihen to Soren ni okeru "Bichiku" no Kouchiku (in Japanese, Soviet Reserves Policies after the Manchurian Incident)", *Tohoku Aija Kenkyu*, no.2, 1997. And also see, Kyosuke Terayama, "Manshu Jihen to Sutarin Taisei - Sensou no Kyoui to 30 Nendai Shotou Soren Kokka-Shakai no Hen'you"(in Japanese,

- Manchurian Incident and Stalinism -The Threat of War and the Change of Soviet State and Society in 1930s'-),doctoral dissertation,Kyoto-University,March,1996.
2. RTsKhIDNI,f.74,op.2,d.38,l.52-53. Full text of this letter is cited in, Kyosuke Terayama, "Soviet Policies toward Mongolia after the Manchurian Incident 1931-1934", in Tadashi Yoshida & Hiroki Oka eds., *Facets of Transformation of the Northeast Countries*, Tohoku University, 1998.
 3. The Politburo resolution about the Non-Agression Pact negotiations with Poland on November 20, 1931, see RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.64. About problems with Poland see also, Kiosuke Teraiama, "Man'chzhurskii Intsident i SSSR(in Russian, Manchurian Incident and USSR)", *Acta Slavica Iaponica*,tomus 14, 1996, Sapporo(Japan). Kyosuke Terayama, "1930 Nendai Shotou no Soren ni okeru Naisei to Gaikou - Manshu Jihen he no Taiou wo Chushin ni -(in Japanese, Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policies in the beginning of the 1930s' - concerning the reaction to the Manchurian Incident)",*Roshia shi Kenkyu*,1997. The relations between Soviet and Finland at that time is also important and interesting to understand Soviet policies toward the West. See, Kyosuke Terayama, "1920-30 Nendai no Kareria, Murumansuku,(in Japanese ,Karellia, Murmansk in 1920-1930s)", *Seiyu Shigaku Ronshu*,no.34,1996.
 4. It is apparent from the letter of Gronskii to Kuibyshev. See, Teraiama,"Man'chzhurskii Intsident i...",
 5. RTsKhIDNI ,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.68. Op.cit. Terayama,"1930 Nendai Shotou no Soren ni okeru ...",At the same time the commission entrusted to discuss Soviet-Polish relations was set up with Stalin, Molotov, Litvinov, Stomoniakov as members on November 26. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.73.
 6. About the Soviet policies toward Japan in detail see Kyosuke Terayama, "1930 Nendai Shotou no Soren no Tainichi Seisaku - Manshu Jihen wo megutte -(in Japanese, Soviet Policies toward Japan about the Manchurian Incident in the beginning of the 1930s')",*Roshia Kenkyu*,no.25,1997.and also see Kyosuke Terayama, "Fukashin Joyaku wo meguru Manshu Jihen zengo no So-Nichi Kankei(in Japanese, Soviet-Japanese Relations before and after the Manchurian Incident)" ,*Shirin*,74-4,1991.
 7. Op. cit., Teraiama, "Otveta na ugrozu.." and op. cit., Terayama,"1930 Nendai shotou no Soren no Tainichi Seisaku..".
 8. RTsKhIDNI,f.81,op.3,d.99,l.49-50.
 9. RTsKhIDNI,f.74,op.2,d.38,l.66.

10. RTsKhIDNI,f.74,op.2,d.38,l.72. Stalin wrote, "Conditions in Mongolia are not so bad". About the Soviet policies toward Mongolia in detail see op. cit., Terayama, "Soviet Policies toward Mongolia..".
11. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.24.
12. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.853,l.3.
13. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.854,l.3.
14. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.855,l.1.
15. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.48.
16. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.51.
17. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.119,l.52.
18. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.53-54.
19. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.55.
20. RTsKhIDNI,f.79,op.1,d.619,l.1-7.
21. For example see RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.74.
22. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.155.
23. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.12,l.154.
24. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.12,l.196-197.
25. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.11,l.33. emphasised by author.
26. GARF,f.5446,op.27,ch.2,d.5,l.6.
27. GARF,f.5446,op.27,ch.2,d.9,l.2. see full text in op. cit.,Teraiama, "Man'chzhurskii Intsident i SSSR."
28. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.858,l.10-18. Emphasized by author.
29. For example, see the Politburo resolution to release 5 millions puds of food in June 23.,RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.12,l.196.
30. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.13,l.30.
31. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.897,l.17.
32. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.3,d.898,l.3.
33. F.M.Rudbch and others ed.,*Golod 1932-33*,Kiev,1990.
34. It is famous that two groups were dispatched to North Caucasus and Ukraine led by Molotov and Kaganovich.
35. RTsKhIDNI,f.17,op.162,d.14,l.142,157,165, and d.15,l.2,17.