

# Stalin's Korean U-Turn: The USSR's Evolving Security Strategy and the Origins of the Korean War

Kim Donggil

At the end of January 1950, Joseph Stalin suddenly changed his attitude toward the Korean Peninsula, agreeing to persistent requests from Kim Il Sung to invade South Korea. Sino-Soviet negotiations earlier that month had resulted in an alliance but forced the Soviet Union to abandon its strategic privileges in China, which were indispensable for its global strategy, and exacerbated Stalin's mistrust of Mao Zedong at the same time. Moreover, the results of the negotiations rendered Stalin's previous global security strategy useless: drawing U.S. attention to Asia by fomenting Asian revolution through Chinese initiatives, allowing the Soviet Union to strengthen socialism in Europe. This new climate of triangular Sino-Soviet – U.S. relations forced Stalin to readjust his global security strategy, which crystallized into the Korean War. The war solved all Stalin's security and diplomatic dilemmas: military conflict between the U.S. and China bound the U.S.'s feet in Asia, it let the Soviet Union buy time to fortify European socialism, and it increased Soviet control over China. Regardless of the victor, the Korean War was a wild card to Stalin, for he had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

**Keywords:** Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance, Korean War, Sino-Soviet Relation, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung

## Introduction

Five years after the conclusion of World War II, the capitalist camp, centered around the United States and South Korea, and the communist camp, centered around the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea, faced off in a direct military

---

*Kim Donggil (dgkim@pku.edu.cn) is Associate Professor in the Department of History, Peking University.*

*Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 24, no. 1 (June 2011): 89-114.

© 2011 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies

confrontation on the Korean peninsula. A day after the North's invasion of the South, U.S. State Department officials interpreted the move as an act planned and executed by the Soviet Union, on the grounds that, "the North Korean government is completely under the Kremlin's control."<sup>1</sup> They understood North Korea's action in terms of an attack by international communism on the democratic free world. President Harry S. Truman believed that, "if South Korea was allowed to fall then communists would be emboldened to override the free nations." Therefore, Truman maintained that the free world must meet North Korea's invasion with firm opposition.<sup>2</sup> Truman's Executive Office personnel paid special attention to Soviet intentions, because they had classified Korea as "the only theater in which the U.S. is capable of conducting immediate general offensive operations with its armed forces."<sup>3</sup> They were more prepared to respond to a communist attack on the Korean peninsula than in other areas, and therefore were immediately able to advise Truman to enter into war.<sup>4</sup> On 28 June 1950, three days after the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. government announced it would dispatch the U.S. 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to prevent a possible Chinese attack on Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan. Truman declared, furthermore, that, "the future of Formosa [Taiwan] must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations." Truman began increasing military and economic aid to Asian countries that he believed faced a communist threat, such as the Philippines and French Indochina.<sup>5</sup> Under its

---

1. U.S. Department of State, "Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State," 25 June 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), Korea, Vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 149-154. The U.S. government was extremely concerned about possible Chinese movements in support of Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, Burmese communists, and Malayan communists; it also worried about a Red Army attack on Soviet satellite Yugoslavia, and possible Soviet moves in Germany and Iran.

2. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman: Years of Trial and Hope*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 333-339; David G. McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc, 1992), 776-778. If America failed to protect South Korea from North Korea's attack, not only in Asia but also in Europe, then the Middle East would be jeopardized.

3. "A Possible Further Danger Point in Light of the Korean Situation," 1 June 1950, NSC-73. The meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) believed that "in all other areas, the armed forces of the U.S. are either not appropriately positioned or are of such inadequacy as to be incapable of effective action in the event of further crisis"; memorandum of NSC Consultants Meeting, "Situation Resulting from Hostilities in Korea," 29 June 1950.

4. Immediately after the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. government decided to keep U.S. military advisors in Korea, actively associated with the Korean Army, and promptly airlifted ten-day emergency military supplies from Japan. U.S. Department of State, "The Secretary of State to the embassy in Korea," 25 June 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, 1950, 143, 156-157.

leader Mao Zedong, the People's Republic of China (PRC) denounced the American deployment of the 7th Fleet to Taiwan, and began increasing its military aid to North Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh regime.<sup>6</sup> In early July 1950, Mao established the Northeast Border Defense Army in Manchuria to prepare for possible intervention in Korea.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a new arena for potential conflict between America and China quickly developed, and the frontlines of the confrontation between capitalism and communism shifted from Europe to Asia.

Until the end of December 1949, Soviet leader Joseph I. Stalin had ardently opposed a North Korean invasion of the South, turning down leader Kim Il Sung's forty-eight requests for permission to attack.<sup>8</sup> Among other things, Stalin blamed the North's unpreparedness, the lack of a favorable international situation, and America's probable intervention.<sup>9</sup> Not only the Soviet Union but China as well held a negative attitude toward Kim's desire to unify the Korean peninsula through military means. In a telegram to Stalin on 21 October 1949, just after the PRC's establishment, Mao stated his opposition to a Northern invasion of the South.<sup>10</sup> On 16 December 1949, at his first meeting with Stalin in Moscow, Mao stressed the necessity for three to five years of peace in order

5. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large [Jessup]," 26 June 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, 1950, 178-180; U.S. Department of State, "Statement Issued by the President," 27 June 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, 1950, 202-203; Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, 339-340.

6. *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* [Zhou Enlai's manuscripts, since the founding of the People's Republic of China], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 524-25; on the Chinese assistance to North Vietnam, see Yang Kuisong, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude Toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 34 (2002), 5-10.

7. Chinese leaders formally established the Northeast Border Defense Army on 13 July, see letter from Mao to Nie Rongzhen, 7 July 1950, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's manuscripts, since the founding of the People's Republic of China], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 428; telegram from Stalin's ambassador to China, Roshin, regarding the deployment of the Northeast Border Army in the vicinity of the Sino-Korea borderline, 5 July 1950, in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii [Archive of the President of the Russian Federation] (hereafter cited as APRF), APRF, fond. 45, opis.1, delo. 331, listy. 79; Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii [Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation] (hereafter cited as AVPRF), AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, delo. 3, papka. 11, listy. 115.

8. Kathryn Weathersby, "New Findings on the Korean War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 3 (Fall 1993), 14; there were at least forty-eight requests.

9. Politburo decision to confirm the following directive to the Soviet ambassador in Korea, 24 September 1949, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, delo. 3, papka. 11, listy. 75-77.

10. Telegram from Stalin to Mao, drafted by Molotov, 26 October 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 332, listy. 47-48.

to return China's economy to prewar levels, again voicing his opposition to a Northern attack. At this time, Stalin expressed agreement with Mao.<sup>11</sup> After World War II, Stalin had worked to avoid a military clash with the capitalist camp, believing the USSR did not have the national power necessary to beat America.<sup>12</sup> Stalin, therefore, like Mao, assiduously avoided direct military conflict with the capitalist camp until the Soviet Union had caught up with America's economic and military might.

Then Stalin suddenly changed his mind regarding war on the Korean peninsula. On 30 January 1950, in response to Kim's 19 January 1950 request for permission to attack, Stalin relayed his approval.<sup>13</sup> Three days later, he sent another telegram asking Kim to keep Moscow's consent a secret from the Chinese,<sup>14</sup> just as he was keeping silent on the matter with Mao, who was in Moscow at the time.<sup>15</sup> From February 1950, he began to supply North Korea with the military equipment and ammunition necessary for an attack on the South, a fact rendering credible the conclusion that he had already made his decision to attack the South by that time.<sup>16</sup> Stalin's position on war in Korea had changed profoundly. Less than three months earlier, in a telegram on 30

11. In response to Mao's explanation, Stalin answered that, "Japan has yet to stand up on its feet and is thus not ready for war. America, though it screams war, is actually afraid of war more than anything, Europe is afraid of war, in essence, there is no one to fight with China." Stalin continued, "if we [Soviet Union and China] continue to be friendly" then the peace of China could be guaranteed affirmatively. I believe "continue to be friendly" meant that China would serve the interests of the Soviet Union. Conversation between Stalin and Mao, 16 December 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 329, listy. 9-17.

12. Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council, 14 April 1950, p. 16.

13. Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky, 19 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, papka. 11, delo. 3, listy. 87-91; telegram from Stalin to Shtykov, 30 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, papka. 11, delo. 3, listy. 92; for an English translation, see Kathryn Weathersby, "To attack, or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung, and the Prelude to War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 5 (1995), 8-9.

14. Kathryn Weathersby, "Should We Fear This?" *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 39 (July 2002), 9; Evgenii P. Bajanov and Natalia Bajanova, "The Korea Conflict, 1950-1953: The Most Mysterious War of the 20th Century," unpublished manuscript, Russian Academy of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, and Working Paper, *Cold War International History Project*, forthcoming, p. 37.

15. Dieter Heinzig, "Stalin, Mao, Kim and War Origins, 1950: A Russian Documentary Discrepancy," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996-97), 240.

16. Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky, 7 February 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, op. 5a, delo. 4, papka. 11, listy. 145-6; telegram from Vyshinsky to Shtykov, 9 February 1950, APRF, fond.45, opis.1, delo. 346, listy. 76; telegram from Vyshinsky to Shtykov, transmitting message to Kim, 12 March 1950, APRF, fond. 45, opis.1, delo. 346, listy. 141; telegram from Shtykov to Maj. Gen. A.M. Vasilevsky, head of Soviet military advisory group in the DPRK, 23 February 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, delo. 4, papka. 11, listy. 148.

October 1949, he lambasted Ambassador to North Korea Terenti F. Shtykov for his failure to contain – and indeed for encouraging – Kim’s belligerence toward the South. Stalin warned Shtykov, explaining how “such provocations [toward the South] could seriously endanger the national interests of the Soviet Union and could induce the adversary to launch a big war. Your actions are totally irresponsible.”<sup>17</sup>

It seems credible therefore, that Stalin’s approval of Kim’s plan in January 1950 coincided with his understanding of a shift in the Soviet Union’s national interests, prompting the question: why did Stalin suddenly change his attitude and agree with Kim’s request to attack the South? What prompted his strategic U-turn? What occurred between December 1949 and January 1950 to change Stalin’s position on war on the Korean peninsula? This article’s purpose, then, is first to examine the changes that had occurred in the triangular relationship between America, China, and the USSR, and second, to determine which of these changes prompted Stalin’s decision in late January 1950 to approve Kim’s attack. Finally, through an analysis of recently uncovered Soviet documents, this study shows how the Korean War figured into Stalin’s evolving global security strategy, suggesting a new framework for viewing the outbreak of the Korean War.

I believe that Stalin’s sudden decision to start a war in Korea needs explanation in the context of his overall global security strategy. I propose that three interconnected factors combined to force him to modify his strategy on the Korean peninsula: First, there were important changes in the international environment, specifically in the U.S.-Sino-Soviet triangular relationship between December 1949 and January 1950. Second, there was Stalin’s need to modify his existing global security strategy in light of the Sino-Soviet negotiations in January 1950. Third, there were attempts by the capitalist camp to engage China, driving a wedge into Sino-Soviet relations, and exacerbating Stalin’s mistrust of Mao. After reviewing prevailing explanations of the war, I will argue that these three factors combined to cause Stalin to approve Kim’s request to attack the South at the end of January 1950, thereby setting everything in motion for the Korean War.

## Prevailing Explanations

Prevailing historiographical explanations of the causes of the Korean War fall

---

17. Cited in Bajanov and Bajanova, “Korean Conflict,” 11-12.

into four categories: First, the interpretation of the Korean War as a civil war, propounded most notably by Bruce Cumings, insists that it was just a domestic conflict.<sup>18</sup> Yet this argument is less convincing in light of declassified Soviet documents showing how Kim had asked Stalin for permission to attack on at least forty-eight occasions. Of course, Kim's resolve to conduct the war indicates belligerent intent, but the fact he asked so persistently for permission, and would not attack until he received it, demonstrates that the decision ultimately rested with Stalin.<sup>19</sup>

A second interpretation by Evgenii Bajanov asserts that Soviet development of the atomic bomb in 1949 and communist victory in China encouraged Stalin to approve the war.<sup>20</sup> Stalin, however, did not view these two achievements as a means to engage America in war, but rather as presenting an opportunity for the USSR to rest, while focusing its attentions on Europe, where it had been barely keeping up in its race with America. Therefore, when Stalin received a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) delegation headed by Liu Shaoqi in the summer of 1949, he requested that China assume the main responsibility for aiding revolutionary movements in Asia. Stalin explained that the Soviet Union planned to devote more resources and time to the strengthening of socialism in Europe.<sup>21</sup> On 24 September 1949, moreover, when the establishment of the PRC was imminent, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU-CC) sent a telegram to Kim denying permission to attack South Korea.<sup>22</sup> After the PRC's establishment, Stalin and Mao discussed the Korean question through an exchange of telegrams and agreed not to launch a war on the Korean peninsula.<sup>23</sup> Stalin, moreover, on October 1949, sternly

---

18. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 445-448, 619.

19. Adam B. Ulam explained the role of Stalin in the Korean War, stating that, "in an athletic event, a race is not initiated by the runners crouching down. The race is initiated by the starter shouting 'go.' That is what Stalin did." Ulam maintained that, "the idea to invade the South was clearly Stalin's." Adam B. Ulam, "Letters: Stalin, Kim, and Korean War Origins," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 4 (1994), 21.

20. Evgenii P. Bajanov, "Assessing the Politics of the Korean War, 1949-1951," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6-7 (Winter 1995), 87; V.M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 78-85; Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 90.

21. Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu* [Standing next to history's giants: Shi Zhe's Memoirs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991), 412.

22. Politburo decision to confirm the following directive to the Soviet ambassador in Korea, 24 September 1949, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, delo. 3, papka. 11, listy. 75-77.

23. Telegram between Stalin and Mao, drafted by Molotov, 26 October 1949, APRF, fond.45,

rebuked Shtykov for not having deterred Kim's provocations toward the South, reinforcing this interpretation; and on 16 December, Stalin expressed agreement with Mao's request for three to five years of peace. All these points strongly suggest that it could have been neither the development of the atomic bomb nor the CCP's victory that moved Stalin to approve Kim's attack on the South – these two developments had little impact on his overall Korean policy at that time.

During a speech to the National Press Club on 12 January 1950, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that he did not include Korea and Taiwan within America's defensive perimeter.<sup>24</sup> A third interpretation by Kathryn Weathersby consequently insists that Stalin decided to attack due to a misguided belief that America would not intervene in a Korean war.<sup>25</sup> Yet this explanation loses credibility upon examination of recently uncovered documents, which record the Soviet and Chinese leadership's analysis of Acheson's speech. The Chinese regarded Acheson's announcement as “an American imperialist attempt to both directly and indirectly control Taiwan, and establish a base for the invasion of Northeast Asia and the Chinese mainland,” and “mask the reality of already having invaded Taiwan.”<sup>26</sup> On 17 January 1950, Mao, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei J. Vyshinsky met to determine how to handle Acheson's declaration. Mao expressed his belief that “the actual purpose of Acheson's spiteful speech was a smoke grenade to disguise the Americans' future attempts to occupy the island of Formosa [Taiwan].”<sup>27</sup> Thus, on one hand, the Chinese viewed the Acheson speech as an effort to justify America's imperialist dominance over Taiwan by pointing out that the Soviet Union already held dominance over Northeast China, Xinjiang, and Outer Mongolia. On the other hand, the Soviets saw the basic purpose of U.S. finger pointing as an overture to win over China and drive a wedge into the Sino-Soviet relationship.<sup>28</sup> In order to

---

opis.1, delo. 332, listy. 47-48.

24. U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Department of State Bulletin*, 22: 551 (23 January 1950), 116.

25. Kathryn Weathersby, “Should We Fear This?” 1-26; Qing Shi, “1949 nian Taiwan jiefang jihua geqian de muhou” [The reason behind shelving the plan of liberating Taiwan in 1949], *Bainianchao* 1 (1997), 41; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 64.

26. *Renmin Ribao*, 7 January 1950.

27. Memorandum of conversation of Molotov and Vyshinsky with Mao, 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 234, papka. 18, listy. 1-7; Mao, cable from Moscow regarding the release of U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's statement of 19 January 1950, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong*, Vol. 1, 245-248.

confront the U.S. initiative and to show solidarity with the PRC, the Soviet Union boycotted the UN Security Council (UNSC), and proposed to China and the People's Republic of Mongolia that they issue a joint statement denouncing Acheson's speech.<sup>29</sup>

Unquestionably, Chinese and Soviet leaders believed America would not exclude Taiwan from the U.S. defensive perimeter, hinting that they held the same belief regarding Korea, but they devoted less attention to U.S. policy toward Korea than U.S. attitudes toward China. Additionally, when Stalin met Kim in April 1950 to discuss details of the attack on the South, he never excluded the possibility of U.S. military intervention, stressing to Kim that even in the event of U.S. involvement, the Soviet Union would not enter.<sup>30</sup> U.S. intervention could no longer have been Stalin's overriding concern. A newly available Russian document strongly suggests, moreover, that Stalin not only expected U.S. entry into the conflict but also even desired it.<sup>31</sup> The argument that Acheson's speech about South Korea resting outside the U.S. defensive perimeter was the deciding factor in Stalin's decision does not accord with the facts.

Fourth, the Chinese scholar Shen Zhihua argues that the war resulted from negotiations for a new Sino-Soviet treaty in January 1950.<sup>32</sup> In January 1950, the Chinese requested the handover of the Chinese Changchun Railway, as well as the Soviet naval base on Lüshun and the Dalian seaport.<sup>33</sup> Shen proposes that the Lüshun naval base was the Soviet Union's main gateway to the Pacific, arguing that the desire to attain a warm-water port was the main reason for

28. Memorandum of conversation of Molotov and Vyshinsky with Mao, 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 234, papka. 18, listy. 1-7.

29. Conversation between Vyshinsky and Mao, 13 January 1950, APRF, fond. 3, opis. 65, delo. 364, listy. 94-98; memorandum of conversation of Molotov and Vyshinsky with Mao, 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 234, papka. 18, listy. 1-7; telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, 28 August 1950, RGASPI, fond. 558, opis. 11, delo. 62, listy. 71-72.

30. Stalin stressed that China's intervention in case of U.S. intervention was a precondition for the war. Report on Kim's visit to the USSR, 30 March-25 April 1950. Prepared by the International Department of the CC of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), Archives of the President of Russia, in Bajanov and Bajanova, "Korean Conflict," 41-42.

31. Telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, 28 August 1950, *Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii* [The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History] (hereafter cited as RGASPI), RGASPI, fond. 558, opis. 11, delo. 62, listy. 71-72.

32. Shen Zhihua, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origin of the Korean War: Stalin's Strategic Goals in the Far East," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000), 44-68.

33. Draft of agreement on Lüshun, Dalian, and the Chinese Changchun Railway made by Chinese Government, 26 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 248, papka. 20, listy. 38-55.

Stalin's approval of Kim's request to attack. Weakening Shen's argument, however, is the fact that Russian icebreakers were already operating effectively in Vladivostok – the USSR's only Pacific port – and that North Korea, which was under the USSR's complete control, had many warm water ports available.

### An Analysis of Post-WWII Soviet Global Security Strategy

Following World War II, the Soviet Union faced a new security and economic crisis. America's development of nuclear weapons and long distance bombers had rendered obsolete the USSR's traditional strategy of trading space for time.<sup>34</sup> Stalin viewed the atomic bombing of Japan as atomic blackmail, as a threat "to unleash a new, even more terrible and devastating war."<sup>35</sup> Soviet leaders feared that this nuclear threat surpassed World War II in its destructive potential, but they could not counterbalance it because their economy was not yet capable of supporting a military – industrial complex like America's. On the one hand, during World War II the USSR had suffered over thirty million casualties and catastrophic damage to its infrastructure, with losses surpassing the national wealth of Germany and Great Britain combined, or around a third that of the U.S.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, U.S. gross national product increased from \$90 billion in 1939 to \$210 billion in 1945, along with the resolution of the Great Depression's unemployment crisis.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the USSR's primary postwar themes were nuclear weapons' development and economic recovery.<sup>38</sup> The Soviet government stipulated three sources for economic recovery: first, domestic resources; second, reparations from Germany; and third, investment

---

34. The Soviet Union viewed the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans as natural buffer zones against the United States, but the development of the long-range B-29 bomber and the atomic bomb made these buffer zones useless, fundamentally altering the security concept. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 42.

35. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 27.

36. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 31; A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 295-96.

37. For statistical data on the U.S. economy during World War II, see U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 224, 228, 1105.

38. Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki vividly demonstrated the feasibility of atomic weaponry. On 20 September 1945, Stalin established a nine member "special committee" under the wartime State Defense committee's auspices to oversee the whole Soviet Union bomb effort; for details on the bomb effort, Mark Kramer, "Documenting The Early Soviet Nuclear Weapons Program," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6, 7 (Winter 1995-96), 265-270.

from America and Great Britain. In particular, the Soviets favored the second and third sources as keys to economic recovery.<sup>39</sup>

War reparations from Germany and investment from America and Britain were issues that required the active cooperation of those countries. Therefore, the USSR adopted a posture of basic cooperation with them in regards to postwar international issues, as evidenced in postwar Iran, Turkey, and Greece, where Stalin deliberately avoided military confrontation. Stalin's strategy was to avoid provoking America and Britain until he had an atomic bomb and the economy had recovered, while concurrently encouraging communist development in Asian capitalist countries, in order to draw attention from Europe to Asia, as well as reducing capitalist pressure on Europe.<sup>40</sup>

The announcement of the Marshall Plan, on 5 June 1947, became the watershed event in the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union. Initially, Stalin viewed the plan with approval, sending a large delegation led by foreign minister Molotov to the Paris conference during 12-15 June to discuss its realization. Yet his attitude radically changed after Soviet intelligence agencies reported on 30 June that the plan would integrate the West German economy with the rest of Europe's, thereby denying the Soviet Union its war compensation and eventually isolating it from Europe.<sup>41</sup> The Soviet delegation returned to Moscow on 2 July, Stalin forbade Soviet satellite states from participating in the Marshall Plan, and he immediately created the Cominform, which focused on the satellites, heading him down the Cold War path and confrontation with America. Intensification of the Cold War not only rendered impossible economic cooperation between Anglo-American and Soviet interests but also increased the responsibility that Stalin felt for Soviet satellites, resulting in an economic drain.<sup>42</sup> The Berlin Airlift, moreover, which occurred a year later, created new security threats, and showed the significant disparity in national power between America and the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup>

---

39. Telegram from Maisky to Molotov, 11 January 1944, AVPRF, fond. 6, papka. 14, delo. 145, listy. 27, 39.

40. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 46.

41. For the Soviet attitude to the Marshall Plan, see Scott D. Parrish, "The Turn Toward Confrontation: The Soviet Reaction to the Marshall Plan, 1947," in "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan: Two Reports," *Cold War International History Project, Working Papers* 9 (1994), 1-40.

42. When the Czechoslovak government refused to comply with the Soviet directive advising Socialist countries of central Europe to cancel their participation in the Marshall Plan conference in Paris, Stalin promised that the Soviet government would purchase Czechoslovak goods and provide immediate assistance in the form of 200,000 tons of wheat, barley, and oats. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 73.

Following the Berlin Airlift, Western Europe – feeling the threat of the “red menace” – established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949. The Soviet Union now faced the unprecedented security threat of confronting both the American superpower as well as the various large powers of Western Europe.<sup>44</sup> Stalin viewed this development as his most urgent concern. He adopted a strategy in which he avoided directly confronting America, while trying to divert its attentions from the critical European theater to other areas. In January 1949, he advised Mao not to cross the Yangtze River but to stay on its northern bank. Stalin's intention was to make China the battleground between capitalist and communist camps and thereby tie America down in that region.<sup>45</sup> In this way, Stalin encouraged the expenditure of U.S. resources in China.<sup>46</sup>

The August 1949 development of an atomic bomb and the CCP victory in the Chinese Civil War gave the harried Soviet Union a chance to catch its breath. Stalin asked Liu Shaoqi during his summer 1949 visit to Moscow to agree to the proposal that “henceforth, the Soviet Union should take charge of revolutionary activity in the West and China will do so in Asia.” Stalin explained to Liu that the USSR would focus all its energies on strengthening socialism in Europe.<sup>47</sup> Stalin had ulterior motives in such a proposition. By letting China lead the communist revolutionary movement in Asia, he hoped for the three-fold effect of driving a wedge between the U.S. and China, preventing Mao from becoming another Tito, and drawing U.S. attention away from Europe and toward Asia.

In his support of revolution in Asian nations, Stalin established the principle

---

43. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 52.

44. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 77; for details on the establishment of NATO, see United States. Dept of States, *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957), 1504-1660.

45. Stalin's mediation for the Chinese intermediation was met with strong objections by Mao and failed. On 20 April 1949, Mao's forces crossed the Yangzi River. Kim Donggil, “Stalin and the Chinese Civil War,” *Cold War History* 10, no. 3 (2010), 185-202; Xiang Qing, “Guanyu Sidalin quanqu jiefang dajun guojiang zhi wojian,” *Dangde wenxian* 6 (1989), 64-66; John Garver, “New Light on Sino-Soviet Relations: The Memoirs of China's Ambassador to Moscow, 1955-1962,” *China Quarterly* 122 (1990), 303-7; Wang Fangming, “Yao shishi qiushi, duli sikao – huiyi Mao zhuxi yijiuwunian de yici qinqie tanhua” [“We Should Respect the Truth and Think Independently:” Recalling an Amiable Talk by Chairman Mao in 1957], *Renmin Ribao*, 2 January 1979, p. 3.

46. For U.S. assistance toward the Nationalist government during the Chinese Civil War, see Tao Wenzhao, *Zhongmei guanxishi* [*History of Sino-US Relations*] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1993), 442-454.

47. Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu*, 412.

of utilizing communist leaders and their militant supporters within capitalist countries, instead of having communist countries directly attack capitalist ones. This would allow him to foment revolutions internally, spontaneously, and therefore covertly. Not only would this policy decrease the likelihood of U.S. military intervention but also, were it to occur, it would give ammunition to deride America while still avoiding direct confrontation. Soviet policy toward the Korean peninsula fits this principle. On 7 March and 24 September 1949, Stalin denied permission for Kim to attack South Korea, requesting instead increased support for the Southern guerrilla movement.<sup>48</sup> Then, in late October 1949, Stalin again emphasized that Kim should strengthen guerrilla efforts in the South.<sup>49</sup>

Stalin did not fundamentally believe in peaceful coexistence with America. He believed that a third world war would one day be inevitable; once the USSR finished developing nuclear weapons and had an economy comparable to America's, it would be able to begin its direct confrontation.<sup>50</sup> Thus, until then, he would avoid direct military confrontation while diverting attention to Asia by supporting revolutionary activities in that region through Communist China. The crux of Stalin's strategy in 1949 was to buy time to strengthen socialism in Europe and secure that continent, which he judged to be vital to the Soviet Union's security.

Following the establishment of the PRC, Moscow's perspective on the Sino-Soviet revolutionary division of labor is evident in the speech of Liu Shaoqi at the Congress for Asia-Oceania Labor Unions and at the Congress for Asia Women's Representatives, held in Beijing on 16-21 November and 10-16 December 1949 respectively. At the opening and closing ceremony for the Asia-Oceania congress, Liu emphasized that, "the basic mission of labor unions is to fight against imperialism," and added that "armed conflict" and "actions like those of the PLA [People's Liberation Army]" are ways to do this. Liu appealed to "the working classes of Asia – Indochina, Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia – to openly fight against imperialism," and offered the "model of the [Chinese]

---

48. Record of conversation between Stalin and Kim Il Sung, 7 March 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 346, listy. 46; Evgenii P. Bajanov, *Aktual'nye Problemy: Mezhdunarodnykh Otnosheniy* [Present Problems: International Relations] (Moscow: Nauchnaya Kniga, 2002), 3, 37; Politburo decision to confirm the following directive to the Soviet ambassador in Korea, 24 September 1949, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, delo. 3, papka. 11, listy. 75-77.

49. Telegram from Stalin to Mao, drafted by Molotov, 26 October 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis.1, delo. 332, listy. 47-48.

50. Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4, 55-60, 207; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 37.

PLA” and support by the PLA for these efforts. He further stated that, “the governments of each Asian nation are merely the puppets of imperialism,” and that armed struggle would soon overthrow them.<sup>51</sup> In drafting the resolution for the Asia Women’s congress, Chinese representatives demanded that the two lines, “Asian nations must conduct armed struggle against the imperialists,” and “Asian women will support to the utmost the people’s liberation armies of such nations,” be included in the resolution. Additionally, Liu emphasized that, “Asian nations should not hope for Soviet or Chinese assistance, instead achieving revolution through their own efforts.”<sup>52</sup> Liu and the Chinese representatives’ actions reflected Stalin’s proposal of a Sino-Soviet division of labor within the world revolution, and dovetailed neatly with his global strategy.<sup>53</sup>

### Sino-Soviet Negotiations in 1949 and Mao’s Departure from Soviet Guidelines

On 16 December 1949, Mao visited Moscow and met for the first time with Stalin. At this meeting, Mao emphasized that, “the most important question at the present time is the question of establishing peace. China needs a period of 3-5 years of peace to bring the economy back to pre-war levels and to stabilize the country in general.” He also expressed a desire for a revision of the Sino-Soviet Treaty signed on 14 August 1945, and the signing of a new treaty between the PRC and the USSR.<sup>54</sup> Stalin responded that, “in regards to China, there is no immediate threat at the present time,” and “peace will depend on

---

51. *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao* [Liu Shaoqi’s manuscripts, since the founding of the People’s Republic of China], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 160-9, 175-81; record of conversation between Liu Shaoqi and representatives of the Soviet Union at the Congress for the Asia-Oceania Labor Unions and Congress for Asia Women’s Representative, 25 December 1949, AVPRF, fond. 0100, opis. 43, delo. 10, papka. 302, listy. 18-30.

52. AVPRF, fond. 0100, opis. 43, delo. 10, papka. 302, listy. 18-30.

53. Representatives of each country, and the Soviet Union as well, expressed strong objections toward the content of Liu’s address and the Resolution of Congress for Asia Women’s Representatives prepared by the Chinese government, and their attitude was immediately reported to Stalin. Stalin promptly sent a telegram, stating that the “Liu Shaoqi address is very accurate and opportune,” and derided the Soviet representative. *Pravda* published Liu’s inaugural address at the Congress for Asia-Oceania Labor Unions on 4 January. Report of the Soviet labor representative on the congress situation in Beijing, January 1950 (archive name and numbers not given).

54. Conversation between Stalin and Mao, 16 December 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 329, listy. 9-17.

our efforts; if we continue to be friendly, peace can last not only 5-10 years, but 20-25 years and even longer.” Regarding revision of the Sino-Soviet Treaty, a rift between Mao and Stalin became evident. Stalin refused Mao’s request on the basis that, “the treaty was concluded as a result of the Yalta Agreement.”<sup>55</sup> Stalin suggested how “Soviet troops at Port Arthur can be withdrawn at the request of the Chinese government . . . however, if this was deemed inappropriate, the Soviet troops at Port Arthur could remain there for 2, 5, or 10 years.” Stalin added that, if the Chinese so desired, “the Soviet troops could even stay for 20 years in Port Arthur,” expressing that the Soviet Union had in fact no intention of withdrawing its troops.<sup>56</sup>

In a telegram to the CCP’s Central Committee on 2 January 1950, Mao explained that the signing of this new Sino-Soviet Treaty was, on the one hand, to internally strengthen the foundation for the CCP, and, on the other hand, to internationally offer more political capital to deal with the imperialist countries and to reexamine each treaty China had signed in the past with the various imperialist nations.<sup>57</sup> Thus, by abrogating the Sino-Soviet Treaty, Mao sought to create a tool, nullifying the previous treaties between the Chiang Kai-shek government and the imperialist powers, particularly America, Britain, and France. Stalin’s personal envoy to Mao, Ivan V. Kovalev, directly relayed Mao’s intentions to Stalin.<sup>58</sup> Stalin even denied Mao’s request for naval and air force assistance for the liberation of Taiwan, making the excuse that he did not wish to “give the Americans a pretext to intervene.”<sup>59</sup> This probably disturbed Mao, given that, in the summer of 1949, Stalin encouraged the liberation of Xinjiang as soon as possible and pledged forty combat planes to assist the Chinese effort.<sup>60</sup> Stalin’s refusal testifies to the fact that liberation of Taiwan by the PRC – a main point of contention between China and America – was not in the USSR’s interests. Ultimately, the first meeting resulted only in nurturing mutual distrust and displeasure between Mao and Stalin.

---

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. *Mao Zedong wenji* [A collection of Mao Zedong’s works], Vol. 6 (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 1999), 38-40; *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 211.

58. S.N. Concharov’s interview with I.V. Kovalev, “The Stalin-Mao Dialogue,” *Far Eastern Affairs*, 2 (1992), 99-100.

59. Conversation between Stalin and Mao, 16 December 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 329, listy. 9-17.

60. Memorandum of conversation between Stalin and the CCP delegation, 27 June 1949, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 329, listy. 1-7.

## Negotiations Toward a New Sino-Soviet Treaty: Deepening the Rift

Following the first meeting between Mao and Stalin, the two leaders did not meet again until 24 December 1949. Although the second meeting lasted from 11:30 PM to 5:00 AM, Stalin never once mentioned the issue of the Sino-Soviet Treaty.<sup>61</sup> A greatly disappointed Mao informed Soviet Ambassador to China Nikolai V. Roschin that he was cancelling his visits to other Soviet destinations and would be reducing the length of his stay from three to two months, leaving Moscow at the end of January. At the same time, Mao informed Roschin that Burma, India, England, and other British Commonwealth countries would soon recognize the PRC.<sup>62</sup> This appeared to be a final ultimatum from Mao. Stalin dreaded the British recognition of China, viewing it as possibly leading to the normalization of Sino-American relations.<sup>63</sup>

Within China, rumors spread about the cold shoulder dealt to Mao by Stalin, and this news quickly came back to Moscow.<sup>64</sup> Western correspondents began to speculate about the Sino-Soviet relationship. Given that Mao had only appeared in Soviet newspapers twice during his visit – once announcing his 16 December arrival, and a second article mentioning his attendance at Stalin's seventieth birthday celebration on 21 December – Western newspapers began to suspect that Mao had possibly been detained by Stalin.<sup>65</sup> At that time, the American government did its best to further aggravate the relationship between Stalin and Mao, hoping to drive a wedge between the two and possibly turn Mao into Asia's Tito.<sup>66</sup>

Under such circumstances, Stalin had no choice but to agree to Mao's requests. On 2 January 1950, Stalin sent Molotov and Anatas I. Mikoyan to Mao's quarters to inform him that he was willing to sign a new Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.<sup>67</sup> The next day, Mao dispatched a message

---

61. Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, *Mao Zedong Zhuan: 1949-1976* [Biography of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 39.

62. Memorandum of conversation between Mao and USSR Ambassador to China N.V. Roshchin, 1 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 0100, opis. 43, delo. 10, papka. 302, listy. 1-4.

63. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, 211.

64. The 50th Circulative Information of CCPCC: Expression of Narrow-minded Nationalistic Thought, 1 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 100, opis. 43, delo. 32, papka. 305, listy. 1-6.

65. Pang and Jin, *Mao Zedong Zhuan: 1949-1976*, Vol. 1, 40.

66. Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origin of the Korean War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc., 2000), 9-23.

67. *Mao Zedong wenji*, Vol. 6, 38-40; *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 211.

to the CCP-CC stating confidently that, “signing a new treaty with the USSR would be favorable for China and would help it to be unconditionally recognized by various countries.”<sup>68</sup> Although Stalin agreed to revise the treaty, he did not intend to change the status quo regarding Soviet rights in China. The drafts of the new Sino-Soviet treaty drawn up at the Soviet Foreign Ministry contained clauses stating, “both treaty nations agree that agreements signed on 14 August 1945 dealing with the China Changchun Railways, Dalian, and Port Arthur will remain effective,” and that “the question of the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the Dalian protocol be discussed again following the conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan.”<sup>69</sup> Still, Mao maintained that “the drafting of a new Sino-Soviet Treaty must stem from completely new relations.” This was because “Japan had ceased to exist as an armed force and the Guomindang had been broken up, and so the situation was different than when the [old] treaty was signed,” and also related to the fact that “a certain group of Chinese people are expressing complaints regarding the existing Sino-Soviet Treaty.”<sup>70</sup> Mao was hinting that he wanted the new treaty to cancel all Soviet special privileges in China. In answering Mao, Foreign Minister Vyshinsky noted how “the question of a new treaty seems to be a complicated matter,” adding that “any kind of corrections may be used as an excuse by the Americans and the English for reviewing and altering parts of the treaty, changes which could cause damage to Soviet and Chinese interests. This is not desirable and must not be allowed to occur.” A significant discrepancy, it would seem, existed between the two countries’ views about the content of the new treaty.<sup>71</sup>

### America’s New China Policy and the Sino-Soviet Disagreement

In November 1949, the Chief of Chinese Intelligence Services Li Kenong and the Soviet ambassador to China, Roschin, predicted that America would work

---

68. *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 213; Shuguang Zhang and Jian Chen, eds, *Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Asia: New Documentary Evidence, 1949-1950* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1996), 132-133.

69. There were five drafts of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance, made by the Foreign Ministry, on 5, 9, 10, 12, and 13-15 January 1950, and they are in AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 235, papka. 18, listy. 13-14, 16-19, 20-22, 26-29, and 30-34 respectively.

70. Conversation between Vyshinsky and Mao, 6 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 0100, opis. 43, delo. 43, papka. 302, listy. 1-5.

71. *Ibid.*

to “Tito-ize the CCP,” and attempt to drive a wedge into the Sino-Soviet relationship. The two assumed that the State Department would label the Sino-Soviet Treaty as unequal and imperialistic, focusing on a takeover of the Northeastern territory of China and the industrial assets within China by the Soviet Union.<sup>72</sup> On 5 January 1950, Truman made a statement regarding U.S. policy toward Taiwan, in which he guaranteed the “territorial integrity of China” and the return of Taiwan to the mainland. America, he continued, had “no predatory designs on Formosa [Taiwan], or on any other Chinese territory,” and he promised that, “the U.S. will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces in Formosa.”<sup>73</sup> That same day, Britain recognized the PRC and expressed its readiness to establish diplomatic relations with China.<sup>74</sup> On 12 January, seven days after Truman’s statement, Secretary Acheson publicly announced that “the Soviet Union is detaching the northern provinces of China from the rest of the country and is attaching them to the Soviet Union.” This process was already complete in Outer Mongolia, and was nearly complete in Manchuria. Acheson was “sure that in Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang [Xinjiang] there are very happy reports coming from Soviet agents to Moscow.” He judged that the taking by the USSR of the four northern provinces of China was “the single most significant, most important fact, in the relation of any foreign power with Asia.” At the same time, he pointed out that Taiwan lay outside the U.S. defensive perimeter. Acheson appealed to China. “Our interests,” he said, “have been parallel to the interests of the people of Asia,” with whom “there was not conflict but parallelism.”<sup>75</sup> That Acheson would make such an announcement, at such a delicate time as China prepared to liberate Taiwan, was an attempt to win over the Chinese by showing them that Americans – unlike the Russians – did not intend to encroach on Chinese territory.

Regarding U.S. policy toward China, Stalin’s advisors believed that America “plans to establish diplomatic relations with China, use trade to make it reliant upon the U.S., and then exert political pressure.” They predicted that, “the U.S.

---

72. Record of conversation between Roschin and Li Kenong on the question of U.S. espionage activity in China, 17 November 1949, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 22, delo. 220, papka. 36, listy. 67-73.

73. U.S. Department of State, ed., *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1950*, p. 11; U.S. Department of State, “Editorial Note,” *FRUS*, East Asia and the Pacific, Vol. 6 (1950) 264.

74. U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, East Asia and the Pacific, Vol. 6 (1950), 258.

75. U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Department of State Bulletin*, 22: 551 (23 January 1950), 111-116.

would use the recognition of China by Great Britain” to establish trade relations, “obtain necessary intelligence through the British people,” and then “use these channels henceforth as a bridge for the normalization of foreign relations in the future with the CCP government.”<sup>76</sup> Fearing that such a conciliatory approach would win China over, Stalin promptly and astutely responded to U.S. measures toward China. In Stalin’s eyes, the entry of the PRC into the UNSC, and diplomatic normalization between China and America, was only a matter of time. In its response to the American overtures, the Soviet Union first boycotted the UNSC on 13 January and suggested that China, together with Mongolia and the Soviet Union, issue a joint statement against America.<sup>77</sup> By boycotting the UNSC, Stalin hoped to show his solidarity with China.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, the boycott of the UNSC excluded the possibility of discussing the question of China’s seat at the UN. Although Soviet delegates withdrew from the UNSC, they suggested that China dispatch a delegate to the UN with the aim of creating an awkward situation between China and America. Even though Mao questioned the legal status of a Chinese delegation, the Soviet Union’s insistence won him over, and he gave his approval to dispatch a delegate.<sup>79</sup>

The events of January 1950 – I reiterate – reveal the many differences between China and the USSR. They had different opinions regarding the Acheson Declaration. Though it had agreed to publish a Chinese-Russian-Mongolian government joint statement in the name of each country’s foreign ministry,<sup>80</sup> China violated this agreement and announced a statement in the name of PRC Information Department head Hu Qiaomu.<sup>81</sup> This aroused

---

76. U.S. plan to provoke Sino-Soviet Relations (Secret Intelligence, no. 034), 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 0100, opis. 43, delo. 142, papka. 315, listy. 53-54.

77. Telegram from Mao to Zhou Enlai and the CCP-CC, 7 January 1950, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 219, 221, 235; conversation between Vyshinsky and Mao, 13 January 1950, APRF, fond. 3, opis. 65, delo. 364, listy. 94-98; memorandum of conversation of Molotov and Vyshinsky with Mao, 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 234, papka. 18, listy. 1-7.

78. Telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, 28 August 1950, *RGASPI*, fond. 558, opis. 11, delo. 62, listy. 71-2; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 64.

79. Conversation between Vyshinsky and Mao, 13 January 1950, APRF, fond. 3, opis. 65, delo. 364, listy. 94-98; *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 235-236, 242-243.

80. Memorandum of conversation of Molotov and Vyshinsky with Mao, 17 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 234, papka. 18, listy. 1-7.

81. As a response to Acheson’s speech on 12 January 1950, *Renmin Ribao* published an article on 21 January 1950 in the name of Hu Qiaomu, which particularly criticized Acheson’s comments on Sino-Soviet relations.

Stalin's and Molotov's suspicions, deepening Stalin's mistrust of Mao.<sup>82</sup> Not only were there differences between the two nations bilaterally but the USSR also fretted over Sino-American relations. As Stalin's distrust of Mao deepened, and his concern with Mao becoming a potential Asian Tito grew, the U.S. policy of engagement toward China in January 1950 ultimately manifested itself in political capital for China and pressure on the USSR.

### China's Radical New Proposal

On 20 January 1950, China's Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai arrived in Moscow for treaty negotiations between the USSR and China. On 22 January, Mao and Zhou met with Stalin for a frank exchange of views to lay out the principles and working procedures of the treaty. Both sides confirmed again that they would nullify the old Sino-Soviet Treaty and sign a new one. Mao and Stalin agreed that the rights to the Changchun Railway and Port Arthur could be legally extended with appropriate changes, and "the agreement on Port Arthur should remain in force until a peace treaty with Japan is concluded, after which the Russian troops would be withdrawn from Port Arthur." The USSR and China concurred that the USSR would forgo its claim to Dalian Harbor, and they agreed on joint administration of the Changchun Railway but failed to agree as to who would take the leading role.<sup>83</sup> Next day, both sides began to discuss concrete issues.<sup>84</sup>

Unexpectedly on 26 January, however, the Chinese side delivered a new draft in which the clauses regarding Port Arthur, Dalian, and the Chinese Changchun Railway were radically different from the terms discussed four days prior. The new draft stipulated that "if a peace treaty with Japan is not signed within three years for whatever reason following the conclusion of the new Sino-Soviet treaty, the Soviet Union will immediately withdraw from Port Arthur," "the Soviet Union relinquishes claims to the naval base at Port Arthur," "the Soviet Union will relinquish all claims to Dalian and the Chinese

---

82. Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu*, 454-456; With regard to publishing the statement under the name of Hu Qiaomu, Mao directed to publish the statement under the name of Hu Qiaomu, see *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 245-248.

83. Minutes of conversation between Stalin and Mao, 22 January 1950, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 329, listy. 29-38.

84. Zhou Enlai, Wang Jiaxiang, and Li Fuchun from the Chinese side, and Mikoyan, Vyshinsky, and Roschin from the Soviet side, were the members who participated in negotiations. *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 1, 251-252.

Changchun Railway, and concurrently announce the transfer of Soviet privileges and responsibilities to the CCP.”<sup>85</sup> As it stood, the Chinese proposal threatened the foundations of Stalin’s strategy toward China and the Asia-Pacific region, based as it was on both Russia’s special privileges in Northeast China and the Chinese Changchun Railroad-to-Port Arthur linkage respectively.

After much calculation, on 28 January, Stalin agreed to accept China’s proposal, on the condition that the USSR “maintain the right to use the Chinese Changchun Railway to transport Soviet military personnel and material at the same rate as the PLA.”<sup>86</sup> This request reconfirmed that the Railway was vital for Soviet military strategy in East Asia. On 31 January, the Chinese agreed to the Soviet request, on condition that the PLA would have reciprocal privileges on Soviet territory.<sup>87</sup> They made this condition purely to assert China’s equality with the Soviet Union, as it had no realistic significance; obviously, using railroads within the Soviet Union would have resulted in silly, time-consuming trips for army units. The Soviet Union’s forbearance soon reached its limit. On 1 and 2 February, Soviet representative Anastas Mikoyan agreed to China’s proposal. Mikoyan, however, could not hold back his disgust with the Chinese, angrily stating that, “as China’s ally, the Soviet Union has conceded all the rights of Chinese Changchun Railway, Dalian, and Port Arthur to China for free, but China does not even permit us the use of one railroad. If China is not willing to concede even this much, are we even allies?”<sup>88</sup> Regarding the conclusion of the meeting, Stalin voiced his dissatisfaction while Mao did the opposite.<sup>89</sup>

Based on a superficial examination of the Sino-Soviet meetings, it is tempting to interpret the results of the treaty negotiations as Stalin’s surrender and Mao’s victory. Such compromise with socialist states by Stalin was

---

85. Drafts of agreement on Lüshun, Dalian, and the Chinese Changchun Railway made by the Chinese delegation, 26 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 248, papka. 20, listy. 38-55.

86. Revised draft of agreement on Lüshun, Dalian, the Chinese Changchun Railway, and the protocol made by the USSR, 28 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 248, papka. 20, listy. 74-80.

87. Revised draft of agreement on Lüshun, Dalian, the Chinese Changchun Railway, and the protocol made by the Chinese government, 31 January 1950, APRF, fond. 3, opis. 65, delo. 369, listy. 3, 15-17.

88. Report of Vyshinsky on the negotiation with Zhou Enlai, 1 February 1950, AVPRF, fond. 07, opis. 23a, delo. 18, papka. 234, listy. 30-32; report of Vyshinsky on the negotiation with Zhou Enlai, 2 February 1950, APRF, fond. 3, opis. 65, delo. 369, listy. 42-43.

89. Pang and Jin, *Mao Zedong Zhuan: 1949-1976*, Vol. 1, 39.

unprecedented. Throughout the meetings, Stalin and the Soviet leadership had developed many complaints about Mao and the Chinese. Yet it would have been quite a reversal in Stalin's behavior simply to give ground without winning some concessions. Against this political backdrop, Stalin sent a message to Kim on 30 January agreeing to his request to attack the South, and another message on 2 February mandating that their agreement be kept secret from the Chinese.<sup>90</sup> In conclusion, Stalin devised his decision to approve a North Korean attack on the South with the aim of narrowing down his world security strategy, handling America's rapprochement toward the PRC, and containing Mao and China.

### Readjustment of the USSR's Global Security Policy: Origins of the Korean War

The January 1950 negotiations with China rendered useless Stalin's previous global security strategy, which he had premised on positive cooperation from the Chinese. His original premise was that Mao and China would be loyal to the socialist cause and would take charge of revolution in Asia. This resulted in drawing increased American attention to that region. Such Chinese actions naturally would drive a wedge in Sino-American relations and allow the USSR to further strengthen socialism in Europe. Fundamental flaws in this strategy forced Stalin to readjust it. The easiest way for Stalin to resolve this global security dilemma was to induce a military confrontation with America in China's vicinity. This would not necessarily have to result in or from a direct military conflict between the two, and he might easily accomplish it by causing a simple confrontation in China's border regions. As it happened, the Korean peninsula satisfied all of the conditions Stalin needed.<sup>91</sup>

Coincidentally, Soviet ambassador Shtykov on 19 January sent Stalin a

---

90. Telegram from Stalin to Shtykov, 30 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis.5a, papka. 11, delo. 3, listy. 92; Kathryn Weathersby, "Should We Fear This?" 9; Evgenii P. Bajanov and Natalia Bajanova, report on Kim's visit to the USSR, 30 March-25 April 1950, prepared by the International Department of the CC of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), in Bajanov and Bajanova, "Korean Conflict," 37.

91. Confrontational areas between the capitalist and socialist camps in the vicinity of China at that time were the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Vietnam was of French interest, and the Soviet Union had no decisive role in the Taiwan question. Yet on the Korean peninsula, the northern area was in complete control of the Soviet Union, and the South was an area of U.S. influence. In addition, Kim had already requested permission to attack the South more than forty-eight times.

telegram informing him of Kim's request for permission to attack the South.<sup>92</sup> Stalin was not one to pass up such a well-timed opportunity. Objectively speaking, the USSR was not forcing war upon North Korea. Rather, it was in fact supporting North Korea in a war to unite a divided people, thereby providing a moral justification. The possibility of a U.S. intervention could no longer be a meaningful concern. On the contrary, it would help to achieve Soviet ends. Not only would it turn American attentions to Asia and induce a confrontation between America and China but it would also force the Chinese to rely more upon the Soviet Union. Stalin had indeed decided to stir up conflict in an area – Korea – that the American NSC judged to be “the only theater in which the U.S. is capable of conducting immediate general offensive operations with its armed forces.”<sup>93</sup>

The best indicator as to Stalin's true intentions is the April 1950 meeting held with Kim in Moscow, at which Stalin stipulated that if America was to intervene, the Soviet Union would remain aloof and Kim should seek help from the Chinese.<sup>94</sup> In May 1950, Stalin said that if China “were not to agree, this matter would have to be postponed.”<sup>95</sup> He made clear that Soviet participation should not be expected and that the war would be conducted solely with Chinese assistance. Until the North Korean attack was a *fait accompli*, the Soviet Union kept it a secret from the Chinese.<sup>96</sup> This was because Mao would most certainly have opposed such a venture.

While, on the one hand, the January 1950 American and British policy of engaging China gave a huge advantage to Mao in negotiations with the Soviet Union, on the other hand, the 6 February aerial bombing of Shanghai by Nationalist Taiwan strengthened Stalin's position, which had already affirmed Soviet agreement to war in Korea. In return for dispatching Soviet fighters to Shanghai to provide air cover, Stalin forced Mao to agree to a secret supplemental treaty, which would halt the encroachment of America and other capitalist countries on Chinese territories bordering the Soviet Union – namely Northeast

---

92. Telegram from Shrykov to Vshynsky, 19 January 1950, AVPRF, fond. 059a, opis. 5a, papka. 11, delo. 3, listy. 87-91.

93 NSC-73, “A Possible Further Danger Points in light of Korean Situation,” 1 July 1950, *Memorandum of NSC Consultants' Meeting*, “Situation Resulting from Hostilities in Korea,” June 29, 1950.

94. Bajanov and Bajanova, “Korean Conflict,” 41-42.

95. Telegram from Stalin to Mao, 14 May 1950, APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 331, listy. 554.

96. Dieter Heinzig, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and War Origins, 1950: A Russian Documentary Discrepancy,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996-97), 240; Kathryn Weathersby, “Should We Fear This?” 9; Bajanov and Bajanova, “Korean Conflict,” 37.

China and the Xinjiang region.<sup>97</sup> Stalin also included a clause stipulating that, “in the event of an attack by Japan or her allies, the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Port Arthur would be postponed indefinitely at the request of the Chinese.”<sup>98</sup> Stalin demanded this clause, I suggest, because he was already certain of imminent war in Korea. If war were to break out then China would have to request the postponement of the withdrawal of Soviet troops – this is precisely what occurred.

In Stalin's calculation, war in Korea would create one of three situations: First, America could choose not to intervene, in which case the battle-ready North Korean military would successfully unify the country. Second, America could intervene without the intervention of the Chinese, in which case North Korea would be lost to the capitalist camp. Third, both America and China could enter the war, embroiling themselves in a direct conflict. Regardless of the outcome, China would have to rely more heavily on the Soviet Union. Even if America did not intervene, it would certainly increase its military presence in Asia to protect Asian capitalist nations under the perceived communist threat. This would draw American attention and resources away from Europe to Asia. In any case, Stalin had something to gain. Events quickly realized Stalin's calculations. Two days after the commencement of hostilities, America deployed its air force to Korea. When it decided to deploy its 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait and declared that Taiwan's future status was undecided, tensions between America and China grew even more serious. In addition, America enacted a policy of militarily strengthening the capitalist nations in Asia, such as Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Stalin's objective in the Korean War is evident in a letter delivered to Czechoslovakian President Klement Gottwald on 27 August 1950, a time when Kim's forces still held an overwhelming advantage on the peninsula. In describing his reasoning behind the January 1950 decision to withdraw from the UNSC and remain absent until the early stages of the Korean War, Stalin explained how one of his goals was “to give the American government a free hand to gain a majority vote in the Security Council, make more mistakes, and show its true colors to the public.” Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal

---

97. APRF, fond. 45, opis. 1, delo. 334, listy. 53; Pei Jianzhang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1949-1956* [A diplomatic history of the People's Republic of China, 1949-1956] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi press, 1994), 25.

98. After the outbreak of the Korean War, the postponement of withdrawal from Lushun was requested to the Soviet Union by the Chinese government on August 1952, and the Soviet Union gave its agreement. Tang Jiaxuan, ed, *Zhongguo waijiao cidian* [Dictionary of China's diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2000), 730.

from the UNSC, he continued, “America has become entangled in a military intervention in Korea and is now wasting away its military prestige and moral authority,” and “I believe that we have achieved all of our goals.”<sup>99</sup> Stalin expected, and to a certain extent hoped, that America would intervene in a military conflict in Korea. This suggests that the sanction of the UN would facilitate U.S. entry into the Korean War.<sup>100</sup> With manifest satisfaction, Stalin evaluated the international changes that the Korean War ushered in, explaining to Gottwald how it was “clear that the United States of America is presently diverted from Europe and the Far East. Does it not give us an advantage in the global balance of power? It surely does.” Stalin was confirming the fact that Europe was his main priority, and that he saw the Korean War as an opportunity for the socialist camp to strengthen socialism in Europe while diverting U.S. interests and resources from Europe to Asia.<sup>101</sup> Stalin did not hide from Gottwald his wish for a Sino-American military conflict. “Let us suppose that the American government continues to be tied down in the Far East and also pulls China into the struggle [in Korea]... What might come of this?” He anticipated that in a conflict with China in Korea, “America would be incapable of a third world war in the near future.” Postponement of a third world war for an indeterminate period would provide the “necessary time to strengthen socialism in Europe. Moreover, the struggle between America and China would revolutionize the entire Far East. Does all this not give us an advantage from the perspective of the global balance of power? It surely does.”<sup>102</sup>

This prediction offers a clue to Stalin’s aims in the Korean War, leading to the conclusion that Chinese intervention would bog Americans down in Asian conflicts, weakening their overall power. Therefore, to realize his goals, it seems that Stalin thought Chinese intervention was inevitable. This lends weight to the argument that not only was Stalin unconcerned with the potential U.S.

---

99. Telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, 28 August 1950, RGASPI, fond. 558, opis. 11, delo. 62, listy. 71-72; for an English translation, see Kim Donggil and William Steuck, “Did Stalin Lure the United States into the Korean War? New Evidence on the Origins of the Korean War,” *Cold War International History Project*, e-dossier, no. 1 (2008), 1-4.

100. Stalin’s statement must be understood in the context of the anti-war mood prevailing in America at the time; his calculation was probably that America would not be able to unilaterally intervene in the Korean conflict, so he therefore wished to provide the moral legitimacy granted through a UNSC resolution by abstaining from the critical vote.

101. Telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, 28 August 1950, RGASPI, fond. 558, opis. 11, delo. 62, listy. pp. 71-72.

102. *Ibid.*

intervention but also that China's agreement to enter the Korean War was a precondition for his approval of a Northern attack on the South. Stalin's expectation in August 1950 came true. On 19 October 1950, Chinese troops started to intervene in the Korean War under the name of a "volunteer army." Thus began an undeclared war between America and the PRC. Interestingly enough, Stalin anticipated that Americans would not easily triumph over Chinese forces, stating that "America can't cope with China" because China is well prepared with "large armed forces at the ready," such a conflict would overextend the U.S. on the Korean peninsula.<sup>103</sup>

After the unfolding of war between the U.S. and China, American experts also expressed reservations about fighting with China in Korea. On 9 November, in a report to the Secretary of Defense, the Chief of Staff emphasized that because of the geographical location of Korea in relation to America, "it would be expensive for the United States" to conduct a war in Korea and significantly less expensive for China. Continuing the war with China would severely weaken U.S. strength, and he concluded that, "the continued involvement of the United States in Korea would be in the interest of the USSR and of world communism by imposing a drain on the United States military and economic strengths." Militarily, if America tied itself down in a strategically unimportant area like Korea then it would also be in the interest of the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) came to the same conclusion as Stalin, estimating that America could not easily defeat China. In addition, the CIA pointed out that "they [Chinese] do not have the military capability of driving the UN forces from the peninsula, but that they do have the capability of forcing them to withdraw to defensive positions for prolonged inconclusive operations."<sup>105</sup> American military leaders believed that continued involvement in a general war with China would cause America "to fall into a carefully laid Russian trap."<sup>106</sup> This evidence lends further credibility to the argument that Stalin's statements in his letter to Gottwald were a reflection of his actual intentions.

Stalin's statements about the possibility of a Sino-American conflict on the Korean peninsula leads to the conclusion that such a conflict would not only

---

103. *Ibid.*

104. Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, 9 November 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, p. 1119.

105. Memorandum by the CIA, 2 November 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, pp. 1220-1221.

106. Memorandum of conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup), 28 November 1950, *FRUS*, Korea, Vol. 7, p. 1243.

undermine Sino-American relations but also exclude the possibility of any kind of Sino-American rapprochement in the near future. Viewing the Korean War from this perspective provides a clearer understanding about Stalin's objectives in boycotting the UNSC, his sudden U-turn toward a war in Korea, and his repeated insistence to involve China in the conflict. As a worst-case scenario, the USSR faced the possibility of losing North Korea to the capitalist block. Yet when compared to the enormous strategic advantages it stood to gain, the possible loss seemed negligible. Within the framework of Stalin's global security strategy, the Korean War – regardless of the victor – could solve all the security and diplomatic dilemmas he faced in early 1950. The Korean War was a wild card through which Stalin had nothing to lose and everything to gain.