

**THE SINO-SOVIET ALLIANCE AND  
CHINA'S ENTRY INTO THE KOREAN WAR**

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In February 1950, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union signed a strategic alliance treaty in Moscow. Only eight months later, China entered the Korean War to "resist America and assist (North) Korea." How was the Sino-Soviet alliance made? Was the Sino-Soviet alliance related to the coming of the Korean War? What role did the Sino-Soviet alliance play in China's decision to enter the war? In what sense did China's entry into the Korean War, in turn, influence the foundation and future direction of the Sino-Soviet alliance? These questions, certainly relevant to a deeper understanding of Communist China's foreign policy as well as the Cold War in Asia, have not been properly answered in the past largely

Union. By the late 1940s, CCP leaders had firmly perceived the postwar world order as divided into two camps, one headed by the Soviet Union and the other by the United States. They viewed their revolution as an inseparable part of the Soviet-led international proletarian movement and excluded the possible existence of a middle ground between the two camps.<sup>2</sup> It is evident that Mao's "lean-to-one-side" statement was consistent with this comprehension of the postwar world structure. The political implication of Mao's decision was straightforward: in the international confrontation between the Soviet-led progressive camp and the American-led reactionary camp, the CCP had no choice but to ally itself with the Soviet Union against the United States.

Mao's "lean-to-one-side" approach also grew out of the CCP's assessment of the serious nature of America's threats to the national security interests of Communist China. In early 1949, as the CCP neared final victory in China's civil war, CCP leaders became very concerned about the prospect of direct American intervention in China. During an enlarged politburo meeting in January 1949, American intervention became one of the central topics. "The Current Situation and the Party's Task in 1949," the conference paper drafted by Mao himself, stated: "When we make war plans, we have always taken into our account the possibility that the U.S. government may send troops to occupy some of the coastal cities and fight us directly. We should continue to prepare for this now so as to avoid being taken by surprise if it really occurs."<sup>3</sup> In March and April 1949, when the Communist forces prepared to cross the Yangzi (Yangtze) River, their military deployment was largely based on the assumption that the Americans might interfere on behalf of the Guomindang (GMD) regime.<sup>4</sup> Although the anticipated American military intervention had not occurred, the CCP leadership, given their belief in the aggressive nature of U.S. imperialism and following the "worst case assumption," continued to view the United States as their most dangerous enemy. Mao and the CCP leadership preferred to believe that "after the founding of the new China it was possible for those imperialist countries, which were unwilling to see their failure in China, to make military intervention in China's affairs, just as what imperialist countries did to the Soviets after the Russian Bolshevik revolution."<sup>5</sup> In the eyes of Mao and the CCP

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<sup>2</sup> Lu Dingyi, "Explanations of Several Basic Problems Concerning the Postwar International Situation," *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation Daily), 4 January 1947; Mao, "The Present Situation and Our Task," *SW*, IV, 1258-59; Liu Shaoqi, "On Internationalism and Nationalism," *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 7 November 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Mao, "The Present Situation and the Party's Task in 1949," *Mao Zedong junshi wenxuan* (Selected Military Papers of Mao Zedong), Beijing: Soldiers' Press, 1981, 328-29.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Military History under the Chinese Academy of Military Science, eds., *Zhongguo remi jiefangjun zhanshi* (The War History of the People's Liberation Army), Beijing: The Press of Military Science, 1987, III, 323-334; Ye Fei, *Ye Fei huiyilu* (The Memoirs of Ye Fei), Beijing: The Press of the People's Liberation Army, 1988, 539-540.

<sup>5</sup> Mao, "Cast Away Illusion, Prepare for Struggle," *SW*, IV, 1487-93.

leadership, "it was the possibility of military intervention from imperialist countries that decided the necessity of China allying itself with socialist countries."<sup>6</sup> By allying China with the Soviet Union, Mao and the CCP leadership hoped to be in a stronger position to face a hostile America.

The CCP's "lean-to-one-side" decision was also closely related to China's domestic politics. According to materials now available, different opinions concerning the direction of the new China's domestic and foreign policies existed between some members of pro-communist "democratic parties" and the CCP. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, vice chairman of the CCP Central Committee and the PRC's first premier and foreign minister, argued that these people "still had illusions of U.S. imperialism," hoping that the new China would be able to maintain a middle path, which was not so radical, in international politics.<sup>7</sup> The opinion of General Zhang Zhizhong, a former close associate of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-

relations, Mao hoped to send a strong signal to Stalin to show his willingness for friendship and cooperation.

During the long course of the Chinese Communist revolution, the development of the CCP-Soviet relationship had been tortuous. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the CCP, as a branch of the Soviet-controlled Comintern, had to follow Soviet instructions from time to time. Among the party leadership, sharp disagreements existed between the native section headed by Mao and the international section headed by Wang Ming (Chen Shaoyu), a Soviet-



the CCP's ability to win. In spite of the fact that the GMD insistently took a pro-American



Moscow earlier. Stalin, according to Mikoyan, did not want Mao to leave his position during a crucial stage of the war, and he was also concerned about Mao's safety and health. So, instead of inviting Mao to the Soviet Union, Stalin decided to send Mikoyan to China. Mikoyan also stressed: "Comrade Stalin asked us to come here to listen to the opinions of the CCP Central Committee and Comrade Mao Zedong<sup>7</sup>oer ing

relations between the CCP and the Soviet Union. In early May, CCP leaders decided that the time had now come to send a delegation headed by a top CCP leader to Moscow. Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai were placed in charge of preparations for the visit. Wang Jiaxiang, a senior CCP Central Committee member and former CCP representative to the Comintern in the 1930s, was summoned back from his post as party secretary in Manchuria to assist in planning the visit.<sup>21</sup>

The preparatory work was completed by late June and the CCP Central Committee decided that the mission would be led by Liu Shaoqi, who was authorized to discuss with Stalin all important problems concerning the international situation and Sino-Soviet relations. He would introduce to Stalin the considerations underlying the CCP's policy line (especially the

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comrades as equals. Later, many top CCP leaders, including Mao, Liu, and Zhou, mentioned Stalin's apology on different occasions, using it as a strong justification for the CCP's "lean-to-

Muslim GMD forces in northwestern China establish an independent Islam republic in Xinjiang, which, he believed, would be extremely harmful to both the CCP and the Soviet Union. He offered to use the Soviet-supported revolutionary forces in Northern Xinjiang to check the GMD so that it would be easier for the PLA to enter Xinjiang.<sup>26</sup> Then Moscow helped the CCP Central Committee to establish direct contact with the revolutionary forces in Northern Xinjiang by assisting Deng Liqun, the CCP Central Committee's liaison person, to travel from Moscow to northern Xinjiang. Before the PLA finally took over Xinjiang in October 1949, the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia became the central linkage of communications and transportations between the CCP Central Committee and CCP agents in Xinjiang.<sup>27</sup>

Most important of all, in their meetings Liu and Stalin touched upon problems concerning the international situation and the division between the Chinese and the Soviets of responsibility in promoting the world revolution and Asian revolution. Stressing that a new world war was quite impossible in the near future and that the world revolutionary forces were marching forward and were much stronger than ever before, Stalin expressed the hope that the CCP would play a more important role in pushing forward the rising tide of world

consensus: while the Soviet Union would remain the center of international proletarian revolution, the promotion of Eastern revolution would become primarily China's duty.

There is no indication in Chinese sources available today that the Korean problem was involved in Liu's talks with Stalin. Several GMD and South Korean sources mentioned that during the spring, summer and fall of 1949, China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union conducted a series of secret exchanges on military cooperations between them in Northeastern China (Manchuria) and Korea. The CCP and North Korea, these sources alleged, signed a mutual defense agreement in March 1949, after the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's visit to the Soviet Union, according to which the CCP would send PLA soldiers of Korean nationality back to North Korea.<sup>29</sup> No Chinese sources can prove the existence of the alleged March 1949 agreement. In my interview with Yao Xu, a Chinese authority on the history of the Korean War, he firmly denied the possibility of such an agreement.<sup>30</sup> But we do know now that in July and August of 1949, right around the time when Liu Shaoqi was in the Soviet Union, the 164th and 166th Divisions of the PLA's Fourth Field Army, the majority of whose soldiers were of Korean nationality, were sent back to North Korea.<sup>31</sup> Considering the fact that a close relationship existed between the Soviet Union and Kim Il-sung's North Korean regime and that the problem of promoting revolutionary movements in East Asia was one of the central topics of Liu-Stalin conversations, we have no reason to exclude the possibility

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<sup>29</sup> *Zhongyang ribao* (The Central Daily, official newspaper of the GMD government), 5 May 1949; Piao Doufu, *Zhonggong canjia chaozhan yuanying zhi yanjiu* (A Study of the Cause of the CCP's Entry into the Korean War), Taipei, 1975, 60-61; see also Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance*, New York: The Free Press, 1975, 32; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. II, "The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950," Princeton University Press, 1990, 359.

<sup>30</sup> Yao Xu, a former intelligence officer of the Chinese Volunteers in the Korean War, is the author of *Cong Yalujiang dao banmendian* (From the Yalu to Panmonjum, Beijing: The People's Press, 1985), the first Chinese monograph on China's participation in the Korean War, and many other articles about the Korean War. In my telephone interview with him on 27 May 1991, he stated that he had never heard of the existence of this agreement; he also pointed out that Zhou Baozhong, one alleged participant of the discussion leading to the agreement according to GMD sources, was then not in the Northeast but in the South (By checking other sources, however, I find Zhou did not leave the Northeast until September 1949).

<sup>31</sup> Both South Korean and American intelligence sources have long alleged that about 30,000-40,000 Korean nationality PLA soldiers were sent back to Korea in the period from July to October 1949 (for a good summary of South Korean and American sources covering this movement, see Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, II, 363, 838, n. 33). One official Chinese source confirms that the 164th and 166th divisions of the PLA were sent back to Korea in July 1949, see The Military Library of the Academy of Military Science eds., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zuzhi he geji lingdao chengyuan minglu* (A List of the Historical Evolution of Organizations and Leading Members of the People's Liberation Army), Beijing: The Press of Military Science, 1990, 878. In my interview with Chinese military researchers who have accesses to archival materials in May 1991, they confirmed that the 164th and 166th divisions of the PLA's Fourth Field Army were sent back to North Korea in the fall of 1949 after "the leaders of the two sides easily reached an agreement." The PLA general staff, according to them, keeps detailed records of PLA units sent back to Korea in 1949 -1950. Unfortunately to researchers, however, these records are now still listed as top classified materials.

that the Chinese and the Soviets had discussed such matters as China's support of the Korean revolution and sending PLA soldiers back to Korea during Liu's visit.

As the conversations between Liu and Stalin progressed smoothly, the CCP and the Soviet Union quickly entered discussions for establishing military and other cooperations between them. On 26 July 1949, the CCP Central Committee cabled to Liu, instructing him to explore with Stalin if the Soviet Union would be willing to supply the Chinese with 100 to 200 Yak fighters and 40 to 80 heavy bombers, to help the Chinese train 1,200 pilots and 500 technicians in Soviet air schools, and to send air force advisors to China. If the Soviets agreed to the first two inquiries, the CCP Central Committee stated, Liu Yalou, the commander-in-chief of China's newly-established air force, would visit the Soviet Union immediately to work out the details.<sup>32</sup> Following the CCP Central Committee's instruction, Liu Shaoqi met with Stalin and other Soviet leaders the next day to discuss these CCP demands. The Soviets responded positively. They even offered, instead of accepting Chinese trainees in the Soviet Union as suggested by the CCP, to assist the Chinese in establishing pilot schools in Manchuria. They also agreed to receive Liu Yalou in Moscow for a more detailed discussion. Liu Shaoqi reported this to the CCP Central Committee immediately in a telegram of 27 July.<sup>33</sup>

After receiving Liu Shaoqi's report, the CCP Central Committee decided at once to send Liu Yalou to the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai received Liu respectively before his leaving, instructing him to pursue Soviet support in establishing the new China's air force which would take the United States and the GMD as its primary enemies.<sup>34</sup> Liu Shaoqi was originally scheduled to return to China in early August. To await the Chinese air force delegation and introduce them to the Soviets in person, Liu stayed in Moscow until 14 August. Liu Yalou and four other Chinese air force officers arrived in Moscow on 9 August. On 13 August, led by Liu Shaoqi and Wang Jiaxiang, they met with Marshall Aleksander Mikhailovich Vasilevskii, the minister of armed forces of the Soviet Union. The Chinese side, introducing the Soviets the details of their own plans, requested the Soviets to help them establish an air force composed of 300-350 planes within one year. Marshall Vasilevskii made it clear that Stalin had already ordered the Soviet air force to do its best to assist the Chinese. This meeting concluded with an agreement that further details for

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<sup>32</sup> Lu Liping, *Tongtian zhilu* (The Path to the Sky), Beijing: The Press of the People's Liberation Army, 1989, 137.

<sup>33</sup> Lu, *Tongtian zhilu*





On 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was formally established. The same afternoon, Zhou Enlai, in the name of foreign minister of the central people's government, notified foreign governments of the formation of People's China. The next day, the Soviet government informed Zhou Enlai that it had decided to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC and to end all relations with the GMD.<sup>41</sup> A pleased Mao personally wrote for the Xinhua News Agency the news report of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, CCP leaders decided to establish diplomatic relations with all "new democratic countries" as soon as possible.<sup>43</sup>

As a central step in the continuous construction of Communist China's "lean-to-one-side" diplomatic framework, the CCP Central Committee decided that it was time for Mao to travel to Moscow. Preparations for the visit started immediately after the establishment of the PRC. On 20 October, Mao wrote to Stalin announcing the appointment of Wang Jiaxiang, deputy minister of foreign affairs in charge of relations with the Soviet Union and East Europe, as the first ambassador to the Soviet Union. Mao pointed out to Stalin that Wang, as a member of the CCP Central Committee, would not only be responsible for "general affairs concerning those new democratic countries in East Europe" but would also represent the CCP Central Committee "to contact with you and the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party for affairs between our two Parties." The choice of Wang Jiaxiang to be the Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union was another sign of Mao's determination to promote cooperation with the Russians.<sup>44</sup>

Mao hoped that his visit would bring about a new alliance treaty with the Soviet Union, which would replace the 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty between the GMD and the Russians. This, as Mao saw it later, "would place the People's Republic in a favorable position by forcing those capitalist countries to fit themselves to our principles; foreign countries would be forced to recognize China unconditionally as well as to abolish those old treaties and sign new treaties with us; and those capitalist countries would dare not to take rash actions against us." A new alliance with the Russians was Mao's first priority.<sup>45</sup>

As he planned for the visit, Mao considered bringing Zhou Enlai with him if a treaty could be negotiated. Mao decided to let Stalin determine if Zhou should come, probably with

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<sup>41</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo duiwai guanxi wenjianji, 1949-1950* (Documents of Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China), Beijing: The Press of World Affairs, 1957, 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> *Renmin ribao*, 4 October, 1949; see also *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the People's Republic, hereafter cited as *Mao Zedong wengao*), Beijing: The Central Press of Historical Documents, Vol. I, 1987, 17-18.

<sup>43</sup> Han et al., *Dangdai zhongguo waijiao*, 5-6, 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> Mao Zedong to Stalin, 20 October 1949, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Mao Zedong to the CCP Central Committee, 3 January 1950, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 213; Han et al., *Dangdai zhongguo waijiao*, pp. 24-25.

the intention of sounding out what Stalin had in mind. On 9 November, Mao cabled Wang Jiaxiang, asking him to inform Stalin that he planned to leave Beijing in early December. He stated: "As to if Comrade [Zhou] Enlai should come with me or not, or should his coming or not be decided after my arrival in Moscow, please ask Stalin to make a decision." Stalin

purpose, but he did not want to take the initiative until Mao clarified himself. So, when Mao asked if Zhou should be called to join him in Moscow, Stalin replied: "If we cannot make certain what we really want to work out, what is the use to call Zhou to come here." Mao, again, made no direct answer.<sup>49</sup>

On 2 January 1950, Tass, the official Soviet news agency, published "Mao's interview with a Tass correspondent in Moscow," in which Mao stated: "Among those problems [I have in mind] the foremost are the matters of the current Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between China and the Soviet Union, and of the Soviet Union's loan to the People's Republic of China, and the matter of trade and of a trade agreement between our two countries."<sup>53</sup> The same evening, Mao outlined three options to Molotov and Mikoyan:

- (1) We may sign a new Sino-Soviet alliance treaty. This will be very favorable to us. [By doing this], Sino-Soviet relations will be consolidated on the basis of the new treaty; China's workers, peasants, intellectuals, and leftist nationalist bourgeois will be greatly encouraged while rightist nationalist bourgeoisie be isolated; internationally we will have more political strength [zhenzhi ziben] to deal with imperialist countries and to examine all treaties signed by China and imperialist countries in the past.
- (2) We may ask our news agencies to issue a joint communique, only mentioning that our two sides have exchanged views on the old Sino-Soviet Friendship and Alliance Treaty and other problems, and we have reached a consensus on all important problems....
- (3) We may sign an open statement, but not a treaty, to list the principles underlying our relationship.

Mao made it clear that only if the first choice was to be implemented would Zhou be called to Moscow; otherwise, Zhou would not come. Molotov confirmed immediately that he believed choice A was best and Zhou should come to Moscow. Mao then asked if a new treaty would be signed to replace the old treaty. Molotov's answer was again affirmative. Mao decided that it was time for Zhou Enlai to come to Moscow.<sup>54</sup>

Zhou and a large Chinese delegation arrived in Moscow on 20 January 1950.<sup>55</sup> Two days later, Zhou, joined by Wang Jiaxiang, Li Fuchun, Ye Jizhuang, and Wu Xiuquan, started negotiations with Soviet officials headed by Vyshinsky, the Soviet foreign minister. Zhou paid special attention to making the forthcoming treaty a solid military alliance. According to Wu Xiuquan, one of Zhou's top assistants, Zhou insisted that the treaty should clearly state that if one side was attacked by a third country the other side "must go all out to provide military



military means. Stalin was worried about American interference and sought Mao's advice. Mao, according to Khrushchev, believed American intervention unlikely. Stalin had thus endorsed Kim's plan to attack South Korea.<sup>61</sup> In the most recent volume of Khrushchev's posthumous memoir (*The Glasnost Tapes*), Khrushchev further emphasizes:

For many years we insisted that the initiative for starting the Korean War came from South Korea....I'm telling the truth now for the sake of history: it was the initiative of Comrade Kim Il-sung, and it was supported by Stalin and many others -- in fact, by everybody.<sup>62</sup>

Although no "hard evidence" in Chinese sources available today will either prove or disprove Khrushchev's accounts, I have at least two reasons to believe that Khrushchev's opinions should be given credit. First, Khrushchev's description of other Chinese-Soviet contacts around the Korean War period is consistent with many Chinese sources. For example, Khrushchev also tells the story of Zhou Enlai's secret visit to the Soviet Union after the UN landing at Inchon and his account of Zhou's visit is compatible with recently released Chinese sources even in small details.<sup>63</sup> Khrushchev's recollections on the Korean problem should be treated much more seriously than those sections dealing with himself in his memoirs. Second, Chinese sources also suggest that the CCP leadership, since late 1949, had begun to downplay the danger of American intervention in East Asian affairs. As discussed before, Mao and the CCP leadership prepared for direct American military intervention in the mainland in the spring and fall of 1949. After no American military invasion occurred when the PLA mopped up GMD stragglers in China's coastal areas, especially in Shanghai and Qingdao, the CCP's perception of "American threat" experienced intricate changes in late 1949 and early 1950. Convinced now that the prospect of an American invasion of the Chinese mainland no longer existed, CCP leaders also believed that the United States was vulnerable both in strategic and military senses in the Far East. With its strategic emphasis on the West as well as its lack of positive support from the allies in the East, in the opinions of CCP military planners, the United States would require at least five years to be ready to enter major military operations in the Far East. This view was further strengthened in January 1950 by Secretary of State Dean Acheson's open exclusion of Taiwan and South Korea from the U.S. western Pacific defensive perimeter.<sup>64</sup> If Stalin had underestimated America's intention and capacity in a major military

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<sup>61</sup> N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, London, 1971, 367-368.

<sup>62</sup> N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, tran. and ed. by Jettold L. Schecter with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990, 143.

<sup>63</sup> See *Khrushchev Remembers*, 371-772; see also part four of this paper.

<sup>64</sup> This view was explicitly expressed by General Su Yu, the person who was assigned by the CCP leadership to charge the Taiwan campaign, in his reports about the Taiwan problem on 5 and 27 January 1950. See He Di, "The Last Campaign to Unify China: The CCP's Unmaterialized Plan to

involvement in the Far East, the CCP certainly shared Stalin's view before the outbreak of the



alone had he released to the Chinese the date of his action. Kim was relying more on the Soviets than on the Chinese.<sup>68</sup>

States would come to rescue South Korea and send the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait to neutralize this area before the end of the Korean conflict. The Korean civil war quickly changed into an international crisis.

Mao and the CCP leadership acted immediately to cope with the crisis situation created by the outbreak of the Korean War. The CCP leadership quickly decided to postpone the PLA's Taiwan campaign plan to focus on Korea.<sup>71</sup> On 30 June, five days after the outbreak of the Korean War, Zhou Enlai decided to send a group of Chinese diplomats, most of whom were military intelligence personnel, to North Korea to establish better communications with Kim Il-sung as well as to collect first-hand materials on the fighting.<sup>72</sup> One week later, on 7 and 10 July, Zhou, under Mao's instruction, chaired two conferences focusing on military preparations for the Korean conflict. A crucial decision was made at these conferences: the Thirteenth Army Corps under the Fourth Field Army would be immediately transformed into the Northeastern Border Defense Army (NEBDA) to prepare for "an intervention in the Korean War if necessary."<sup>73</sup> By early August, more than 250,000 troops of the former Fourth Field Army had taken positions on the Chinese-Korean border.<sup>74</sup>

When the North Koreans failed to force the UN forces from Korea, the CCP leadership became concerned with a possible reversal of the Korean situation and speeded up preparations for Chinese involvement in the Korean War. On 4 August 1950, the CCP politburo met to discuss the Korean situation. According to the memoirs of Bo Yibo, a member of the CCP Central Committee at that time, Mao made his opinion clear at the meeting: "If the U.S. imperialists won the war, they would become more arrogant and would threaten us. We should not fail to assist the Koreans. We must lend them our hands in the form of sending our military volunteers there. The timing could be further decided, but we have to prepare for this."<sup>75</sup> The next day, Mao ordered the NEBDA to complete preparations for war operations in early September.<sup>76</sup>meeting: "If the U.S. imperialists won th4rders



into any complexity which might result in a showdown with the United States.<sup>82</sup> Although no Chinese sources available now have released any concrete discussions between top leaders of Beijing and Moscow for the period from late June to late September 1950, it is not implausible to believe that the CCP leadership would have maintained close contacts with the Soviets.<sup>83</sup> And Mao had no reason not to take Stalin's cautious attitude seriously.

UN forces' successful landing at Inchon on 15 September changed the entire trend of the Korean War. With the gradual collapse of North Korean resistance and the northward march of UN forces, the CCP leadership had to view the development of the Korean War from a new perspective: the safety of China's border with Korea was now severely menaced by UN forces rapidly moving toward it. The CCP leadership acted immediately to step up its preparations for sending troops to Korea. The CMCC decided on 17 September to send a group of military officers to Korea to "get familiar with the general situation, make surveys of Korean topography, and prepare for future battles."<sup>84</sup> Three days later, Zhou Enlai laid down the principles for Chinese intervention in Korea, which emphasized the importance of carrying out the war to resist America and assist Korea "on the basis of self-reliance."<sup>85</sup> This implied that CCP leaders were considering sending troops to Korea even without a firm backing of the Soviet Union.

Facing the new situation after Inchon, however, the Soviets seemed willing to do more. When the Chinese discussed with the Soviets about possible Chinese-Soviet cooperation in intervening in Korea, the two sides, obviously following the spirit of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty, reached a general understanding that if the Chinese land forces entered the Korean War, the Soviet Union would send their air forces to Korea to provide an air umbrella for the Chinese.<sup>86</sup> Mao, who had been so inclined to send troops to Korea, had now a stronger basis to step forward.

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<sup>82</sup> Yao Xu, *Cong Yalujiang dao banmendien*, 22; Xu Yan, *Diyici jiaoliang: Kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng de lishi huigu yu fansi* (The First Confrontation: A Historical Review of the War to Resist America and Assist Korea), Beijing: the Press of Chinese Broadcasting and Television, 1990, 22.

<sup>83</sup> In actuality, we do know, through one Chinese source, that a Soviet air force division, "following the agreement of the Chinese and Soviet governments," arrived in the Northeastern area in August 1950, "to take the responsibility of defending this area." This is a clear indication of Sino-Soviet contacts during the early period of the Korean War. See Wang and Lin et al., *Dangdai zhongguo kongjun*, 78.

<sup>84</sup> Chai and Zhao, *Banmendien tanpan*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> spon Tw bey, .52 Ta mad ched se land forces e2 Tathrough one Chinese source1 1" arrived 2 Tf 0a458 TredXu,

The final decision to send Chinese troops to Korea was made between 1 October and 2 October. Two important events paved the way for the decision. First, on 30 September, the Third Division of the South Korean Army crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. And the next day, General Douglas MacArthur issued an ultimatum to Kim

declaration of war on China would not be a real problem. So far as China's war aims are concerned, Mao emphasized: "Since we have decided to send Chinese troops to Korea to fight the Americans.... we should be able to solve the problem, that is, we are going to annihilate the aggression troops of America and other countries, and drive them out [of Korea]." <sup>90</sup> By stressing both the worst and best prospects facing China, Mao obviously hoped that the Russians would abide by their promise to cooperate with the Chinese so that the best could be pursued.

From 3-7 October, the CCP Politburo held a series of expanded meetings to discuss Mao's decision at Beijing. Mao dominated these meetings. As the person responsible for the decision to enter the Korean War, he clarified the case for intervention and rebutted opposition from his comrades. He and his supporters stated reasons for sending troops to Korea, emphasizing that the Korean problem concerned not only the security of China but also the fate of the confrontation between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp in the East. They also believed that comparing China's situation with that of the United States, China was superior in terms of manpower, moral strength, and support from the people, which would compensate for China's inferiority in terms of weapons and equipment. These meetings confirmed Mao's decision to send Chinese troops to Korea, and Peng Dehuai was selected as the commander-in-chief of the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) to Korea. <sup>91</sup> On 8 October, Mao, as the chairman of the CMCC, formally issued the order to enter the Korean War. <sup>92</sup>

Chinese military forces acted immediately. On 8 October, Peng Dehuai flew to Shenyang and established CPV headquarter there. The same evening, Peng met with Park Il-yu, Kim Il-sung's representative in Shenyang, to discuss Chinese troops' entry into Korea. At the same time, Ni Zhiliang, Chinese ambassador to Korea, went to Kim Il-sung's underground headquarters in Pyongyang to inform the latter that the CCP had decided to send Chinese troops to Korea. <sup>93</sup> On 9 October, Peng convened a conference attended by all the army level

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<sup>90</sup> Mao Zedong to Stalin, 2 October 1950, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 539-540.

<sup>91</sup>

cadres of the 13th Army Corps, ordering them to complete preparations for battle in days.<sup>94</sup> At this stage, the Chinese troops, like an arrow on a bowstring, prepared to enter the battle.

The situation suddenly changed, however, at this juncture. At the same time Mao had issued orders to send Chinese troops into Korea, Zhou Enlai, together with interpreter Shi Zhe, had flown to the Soviet Union to finalize details of Chinese-Soviet military cooperation in Korea.<sup>95</sup> Joined by Lin Biao, a member of the CCP Politburo who went to Russia to receive medical treatment, and Wang Jiaxiang, Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Zhou met Stalin at a villa on the Black Sea on the evening of 9 October.<sup>96</sup>

The meeting was a long one -- lasting from 7 PM on 9 October to 5 AM the next morning. The meeting was supposed to focus on how many fighters and bombers the Soviet Union could send to Korea while the Chinese land forces entered the Korean War, and who

This sudden Soviet change of heart caused serious problems for the Chinese leadership. Mao and other CCP leaders in Beijing now had to decide if they should go ahead on their own without the protection of the Soviet air umbrella. Mao cabled to Peng Dehuai and other leading figures in the Northeast area on the evening of 12 October, ordering the Thirteenth Army Corps to stop all movement. Peng and Gao were ordered to return to Beijing immediately to attend a politburo meeting.<sup>98</sup>

The CCP politburo held an emergency meeting on 13 October to discuss whether China should intervene without Soviet air support. After an overnight meeting, they decided to go on, and Peng immediately called Xie Fang, chief of staff of the CPV, asking CPV units to continue preparation for entering Korea.<sup>99</sup> After the meeting Mao cabled to Zhou:

... I have consulted with comrades in the Politburo. The consensus is that it is still advantageous to send our troops to Korea. At the initial stage of the war, we can concentrate on fighting the [South Korean] puppet army, for we may cope with the puppet army with certainty. We can establish bases in the vast mountainous areas north to the line between Wonsan and Pyongyang. This will encourage the Korean people. If we are able to eliminate several puppet divisions in this stage, the Korean situation would take a turn for our favor. The above positive policy will be very advantageous to China, to Korea, to the East, and even to the whole world. If we do not send off our troops, and allow the enemy to reach the Yalu River, the enemy will be swollen with arrogance. This will result in a variety of disadvantages to us, especially to the Northeast area. The whole Northeast Border Defense Army will be tied down there, and



but the destiny of an Eastern and world revolution, of which the Chinese Communist revolution was an important part. Given his frame of reference, Mao had to enter the Korean War. This is why even a dramatic shift (such as Stalin's breaking his promise to provide air support) did not alter Mao's resolve.

But the sudden Soviet change inevitably left a stamp on the Chinese approach to intervene in the Korean War. Mao and the CCP leadership, facing the cruel fact that their troops would not be protected from air attack in Korea, were forced to further restrict the scope of their goals in the initial stage of the war. Mao telegraphed Zhou on 14 October, summarizing the CPV's strategy for the initial fighting: The CPV troops were to take a defensive position after entering Korea; they would establish a defensive perimeter, composed of two or three defense lines north to Pyongyang and Wonsan in order to keep bases as the starting point for future offensives. If UN troops attacked the perimeter in six months, they planned to wipe out the enemy before the perimeter; if UN troops did not initiate an offensive, the Chinese would not either. Only after all preparations were completed would they launch a counter-offensive toward Pyongyang and Wonsan.<sup>102</sup>

The Soviet "betrayal" at this crucial juncture made clear to Mao and the CCP leadership the limitations of the Sino-Soviet alliance. The Chinese desperately needed Soviet support in any form at this moment, and Mao had no other choice but to swallow the fruit of the Russian betrayal. Mao, however, would never forgive it. We have every reason to believe that a seed of the future Sino-Soviet split had thus been sowed in the process of China's intervention in the Korean War.

After the CCP leadership decided to keep its original plan to enter the war, Peng Dehuai returned to Shenyang immediately. On the morning of 15 October, Mao cabled to Gao and Peng, instructing the CPV advanced units to cross the Yalu no later than 17 October.<sup>103</sup> On 16 October, Peng chaired a conference attended by division level cadres from the CPV. He conveyed the final decision of the Politburo, and announced that Chinese troops would move into Korea as soon as possible. He stressed that all units must be prepared for a difficult and protracted war.<sup>104</sup> Some CPV units on the China side of the Yalu received orders to cross the

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<sup>102</sup> Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai, 14 October 1950, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 558-559.

<sup>103</sup> Mao Zedong to Gao Gang and Peng Dehuai, 15 October 1950, *ibid.*, 564.

<sup>104</sup> Zhang, "Before and After Peng Dehuai: Appointment to Command the CPV in Korea," 53-54; Shen and Meng et al., *Zhongguo*

Yalu on the evening of 17 October. A regiment of the Forty-second Army even entered Korea on the early morning of 17 October.<sup>105</sup>

Influenced by the effect of the Soviet change of heart, Mao's mind wavered again at this moment. In a telegram to Peng and Gao on 17 October, he ordered the advanced units of the CPV to continue "preparing to" enter Korea on 19 October and to wait for a "formal order" which would be issued on 18 October. He also asked Peng and Gao to come back to Beijing again for a discussion.<sup>106</sup> This occurred in the background that Zhou Enlai would come back to Beijing on 17 October, and Mao did not feel totally comfortable to issue the final order until he met Zhou and received a first-hand report about Stalin's stand. Top CCP leaders met again on 18 October. Zhou brought back the message that Stalin promised to supply the Chinese with military equipment and ammunition they needed in the Korean conflict, and Soviet air forces, while not directly entering the Korean War, would provide the Chinese with an umbrella over China's territory.<sup>107</sup> Mao eventually set up the evening of 19 October as the deadline for the CPV to cross the Yalu on . He personally cabled Deng Hua and other CPV commanders (Peng and Gao were then still in Beijing) to inform them of the order.<sup>108</sup> First time in ten days, Mao had a solid sleep.<sup>109</sup> On 19 October 1950, Chinese troops crossed the Yalu.

Let me conclude this long paper with a brief summary of important points I hope to emphasize and problems remaining unsolved at this stage.

The Sino-Soviet alliance served as the corner stone of the PRC's foreign policy in its early years. Strategic cooperations between China and the Soviet Union and communications between Mao and Stalin, though not free from trouble, were generally substantial, comprehensive, and effective. Since Liu Shaoqi's visit to the Soviet Union in July and August 1949, the CCP and the Soviet Union had virtually divided spheres of responsibilities between them, leaving the promotion of revolutionary movements in East Asia primarily as China's duty. While it is still unclear to what extent China was involved in Kim Il-sung's preparations

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<sup>105</sup> Xu, "The Tortuous Process of Making the Final Decision to Enter the Korean War," 11.

<sup>106</sup> Mao Zedong to Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang, 17 October 1950, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 567.

<sup>107</sup> See Xu, "The Tortuous Process of Making the Final Decision to Enter the Korean War," 11-12. From October to December 1950, the Soviet Union sent 13 air divisions, including 12 fighter divisions and 1 bomber division to Northeastern, Northern, Eastern, and Central-south China, to assist the Chinese in strengthening these areas' air defense and help train Chinese air units. Wang and Lin et al, *Dangdai zhongguo kongjun*, 78-79.

<sup>108</sup> Mao Zedong to Deng Hua, Hong Xuezhai, Han Xianchu, and Xie Fang, 18 October 1950, *Mao Zedong wengao*, I, 568.

<sup>109</sup> Li Yingqiao (Li was the head of Mao's guardians at that time), *Zhouxia shentan de Mao Zedong* (The Mao Zedong Who Was No Longer a God), Beijing: Chinese and Foreign Culture Publisher, 1989, 122-13.

for unifying his country by military means (an answer to this question will depend upon materials to come out in the future), it seems certain that both China and the Soviet Union supported, or at least did not oppose, Kim's determination. And before the outbreak of the Korean War, both the CCP and the Soviet Union had underestimated America's ability and willingness to engage in major military operations in East Asia. China's decision to enter the

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