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**STALIN'S DECISION: THE ORIGINS OF THE KOREAN
WAR**

by

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STALIN'S DECISION: THE ORIGINS OF THE KOREAN WAR

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ABSTRACT

Despite an initial denial in 1949, in 1950 Stalin decided to support Kim Il-sung's request for military operations to unify Korea. This historical approach into the origins of the Korea War explores how Stalin's role in manipulating both Mao Zedong and Kim into conflict in Korea. His approach allowed for two critical strategic and political victories for the Soviet Union in the early stages of the Cold War. First, with the revolutionary success of the Chinese, Stalin could use the communist movement in East Asia to further secure the Soviet buffer zones. Second, in approving Kim's war plans, Stalin forced Mao to abandon his desire to capture Taiwan and instead divert military efforts toward the Korean peninsula. Thus, Stalin was able to successfully use the Korean War as a means for his more important objective: the continued isolation of China from the United States.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
KMT	Kuomintang
KPA	Korean People's Army
NSC	National Security Council
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

On September 3, 1949, the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Il-sung, sought Soviet "permission to begin military operations against the south."¹ The request was brought before the Soviet Politburo and their response to Kim left no room for interpretation: "It is impossible," the Politburo declared, "to view this operation other than as the beginning of a war between North and South Korea, for which North Korea is not prepared either militarily or politically."² Thus, it is apparent that in September 1949, Joseph Stalin believed war in Korea would result in a communist defeat. In a May 1950 telegram to China's leadership, however, it appeared that Stalin had changed his mind: "The present situation," he declared, "has changed from the situation in the past [so] that North Korea can move towards actions."³ What motivated Stalin's political and strategic shift regarding Korea?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The origins of the Korean War show how Soviet and Chinese leaders manipulated conditions on the Korean peninsula in light of their own political and strategic goals. Korean national unification, an ideal embraced by the leadership of both the North and the South, was not a central concern for either Stalin or Mao Zedong. North Korea, and Kim Il-sung himself, were instead strategic and political means to an end. It was Stalin who determined when major combat operations would begin, and in doing so he manipulated both Mao and Kim to advance his Cold War aims.

¹ Terenti Shtykov, "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky," September 3, 1949, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112129>.

² Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo, "September 24, 1949 Politburo Decision to Confirm the Following Directive to the Soviet Ambassador in Korea," Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112133>.

³ Andrey Vyshinsky, "Cable from Vyshinsky to Mao Zedong, Relaying Stalin's Stance on Permission for North Korea to attack South Korea," May 14, 1950 Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115976>.

Soviet foreign policy in the late 1940s revolved around “three major categories: peaceful coexistence, world revolution, and national security.”⁴ Stalin had to integrate Korea into these larger foreign policy concerns. In September of 1949 when Stalin first refused Kim’s request to go to war, Stalin worried that a war on the Korean peninsula would involve the United States and thus risk Soviet national security. His diplomatic interference marked an early attempt to influence countries not part of the Soviet bloc.⁵ Stalin’s ability to manipulate both Beijing and Pyongyang from afar shows just how powerful the leader of the Soviet Union was in East Asia.

To determine why Stalin decided to change his mind regarding combat operations in Korea, it is critical to explore the political and strategic changes between September 1949 and May 1950, a period in which, from Stalin’s perspective, sufficiently significant shifts in world politics must have occurred to make the risk of war acceptable. Stalin also insisted that Kim receive Mao’s approval for operations, and warned that “if he ran into difficulty with the United States, he would have to depend on China, not the Soviet Union, to bail him out.”⁶ One of the policy considerations that led Stalin to regard war in Korea as acceptable was that such a conflict would help to isolate China from the Western powers in general and the United States specifically. To accomplish this diplomatic isolation, Stalin sought to hinder the completion of Mao’s revolution by denying critical materials that would allow for the successful capture of Taiwan. At the same time, Stalin’s refusal to commit Soviet troops to a conflict in Korea reflects his underlying concern to avoid sparking a direct conflict with the United States.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no shortage of literature on the Korean War; however, this thesis focuses on a particular and critical aspect of its origins by exploring the personal dynamics between Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il-sung.

⁴ Shen Zhihua, “Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War: Stalin’s Strategic Goals in the Far East,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000): 46.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 73.

There is a substantial academic literature exploring these leaders' interactions. In *Uncertain Partners*, Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai explore the tense relationship between Stalin and Mao as they attempted to move past political and personal doubts of each other to create a security alliance between their nations.⁷ Using a collection of telegrams, primary documents, and interviews, they show the development of the Sino-Soviet alliance through the diplomatic meetings of both Chinese and Soviet leaders.

Following the creation of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, the authors explore the dynamics between leaders and their decision to reunify Korea. War consultations in December 1949 indicate that it was indeed Kim who pursued Stalin's approval for combat operations in Korea.⁸ This view, based on declassified documents following the fall of the Soviet Union, altered the long held belief that the Korean War was a result of Soviet expansionism.⁹ While refusing his proposal, "the Soviet leader found Kim's reunification ideas interesting enough to discuss them with Mao."¹⁰ Primary documents and interviews with key diplomatic officials (Khrushchev, Molotov, and Kovalev) along with telegrams are used by the authors to show how Kim was able to seek and obtain both Stalin's and Mao's approval for the unification of Korea by force.¹¹

Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai offer great insight into the relationship between Stalin, Mao, and Kim; yet during the period of time when they conducted their research, they were able to access only a small percentage of the vast Soviet archives made available to the public in 1990. Although they were able to apply some of the new data, their publication schedule prevented extensive research into the newly available

⁷ Sergei N. Goncharov, John Wilson Lewis, and Litai Xue, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 138.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Allen Sues Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Rand Corporation, 1960), 48; Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956), 102; Trumbull Higgins, *Korea and the Fall of MacArthur: A Précis in Limited War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 25.

¹⁰ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 139.

¹¹ Ibid., 143.

documents; the authors themselves note, “We believe that it will be some years before these materials will be fully processed and made available to scholars.”¹²

Building upon *Uncertain Partners*, Richard C. Thornton utilized then recently declassified and newly available documents to further explore the relationship between Stalin, Mao, and Kim. In *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao and the Origins of the Korean War*, Thornton uses sources from Russia, China, and the United States to provide new interpretations on the origins of the war, development of the Sino-Soviet alliance, and strategic goals for both the Soviet Union and China.¹³ Reversing a growing scholarly consensus that it was Kim, not Stalin, who sought the Korean War; Thornton claims that Stalin, having been persuaded by Kim, was the instigator of the conflict through the carefully developed manipulation of Mao.¹⁴ The decision to allow Kim’s forces to attack was less about the reunification of Korea than a move intended to fulfill Stalin’s larger motive of isolating China from the United States.

Odd Man Out shows that from the earliest stages of the Sino-Soviet treaty, Mao and Stalin differed over China’s political and strategic goals. The terms of the Sino-Soviet treaty, according to Thornton, were in large part based upon the very real possibility of war in Korea. In fact, Stalin had already accepted that a war in Korea was inevitable before the treaty was signed. Stalin’s goal was to prevent Mao from retaking Taiwan and potentially establishing relations with the United States.¹⁵ Thus according to Thornton, “It was Stalin’s objective to employ conflict in Korea to maneuver China into confrontation with the United States, and thus subordinate Mao to Soviet strategy.”¹⁶

Many authors attribute Stalin’s strategic shift in favor of combat operations in Korea to his acceptance of Mao and Kim’s guarantee of swift victory, and his belief that

¹² Ibid., ix.

¹³ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao and the Origins of the Korean War*, (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 2001), 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the United States would not become involved in a Korean War.¹⁷ Thornton argues that Stalin thought differently: he believed that even with the signing of the Sino-Soviet treaty, an American military response remained a possibility. To ensure that United States and Chinese forces met in combat, Thornton claims that Stalin intentionally withheld support to the North Korean Army. Telegrams in the early stages of the war show Stalin pressing Mao to begin preparations to support Kim.¹⁸

In his 2000 article “Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War,” Shen Zhihua focuses on Stalin’s shift in strategic motives in Korea by exploring one of these declassified telegrams.¹⁹ After a series of denials by Stalin for Kim to engage in combat operations, the May 14, 1950, telegram shows a reverse course stating “that North Korea can move toward actions.”²⁰ This decision rested on Stalin’s insistence that Kim seek approval from Mao prior to commencing operations. By looking at the political and historical relationship between Korea and the Soviet Union, Stalin’s incentives for war, and the decision mechanisms to determine means of success in a Korean War, Shen shows how Stalin changed his mind to support Kim. Shen expounds upon Kathryn Weathersby’s “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950” by expanding on Kim’s assurance that, based largely on Secretary of State Acheson’s January 1950 defense perimeter speech, “the North Koreans would launch a decisive surprise attack...thus the United States would not have sufficient time to intervene.”²¹

Chen Jian’s *China’s Road to the Korean War* explores the breakdown of Sino-American cooperation following the demise of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).²² His analysis shows how initial diplomatic

¹⁷ Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 89; Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 141; William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 31.

¹⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 4.

¹⁹ Shen “Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War,” 63.

²⁰ Vyshinsky, “Cable from Vyshinsky to Mao Zedong.”

²¹ Kathryn Weathersby, Cold War International History Project, and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, *Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945–1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives*, (Washington, DC, 1993), 6.

²² Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 43.

relations with the United States and the CCP are manipulated by the Soviet Union resulting in a severing of diplomatic relations with Communist China, which lasted until 1979. Chen explores Mao's decision to lean toward the Soviet Union, and the historical and political foundation for the Sino-Soviet Alliance, issues that are also addressed by William Stueck.²³ Chen shows how diplomatic breakdown prevented direct communication with the United States and caused the subsequent mistrust from each nation as the Cold War erupted on the Korean peninsula.²⁴

In *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, Allan R. Millett argues that Stalin's strategic focus in 1949 was not aimed at East Asia, but instead toward the western Soviet border with Europe.²⁵ Stalin had witnessed communist parties in France and Italy fail and found that Arab and Persian nationalism hindered the spread of Marxist/Leninist ideology into the Middle East. Thus with the majority of his attention focused westward, Stalin believed that any liberation efforts in East Asia had to be led by Asians.²⁶ Thus Millett, like most of authors discussed above, portrays Stalin's approval of Kim's plan as contingent on Mao's approval. Unlike Shen, however, Millett describes Mao's approval as reluctant, because his focus was on taking Taiwan and not coming to the aid of the Korean People's Army (KPA) if necessary.²⁷

Drawing on the expanding amounts of information available after 1990 from the United States, Russia, and China, William Stueck attempts to fill gaps regarding Stalin, Mao, and Kim in his book *Rethinking the Korean War*.²⁸ Further expounding on the personal dynamics between Stalin, Mao, and Kim, Stueck sees reluctance on the part of both Stalin and Mao to support Kim. Stalin remained concerned that a war in Korea

²³ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 71.

²⁴ Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 43.

²⁵ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 198.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 245.

²⁸ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 70.

would invoke a response from the United States.²⁹ Mao, in contrast to foreign intervention, remained focused on finishing the eradication of the KMT in China.³⁰ While most of Stueck's arguments are based on primary documents, several of his conclusions, including Stalin's insistence that Kim seek Mao's approval prior to commencing military operations, are based instead on secondary sources, most notably writings on the Sino-Soviet Alliance by Chen Jiang.

Many of the above authors have argued that either Kim or Mao, quite possibly both, convinced Stalin that the United States would not interfere in a Korean civil war. It is unclear if this consideration influenced Stalin's decision. It is unlikely, however, that Stalin would simply accept Mao and Kim's assessment of American foreign policy without intensive scrutiny, given his overarching desire to avoid open conflict with the other superpower.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Between September 1949 and May 1950, one of the critical changes in world politics was the success of the CCP in its civil war with Chiang Kai-shek's KMT. Even before the military victory in a June 30, 1949, speech, Mao announced that the CCP would ally with the Soviet Union.³¹ The decision to ally with Moscow ultimately led to the conclusion of the Sino-Soviet alliance on February 14, 1950.³² The Sino-Soviet treaty was quite explicit regarding mutual support for combat operations. Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had insisted that the treaty "clearly state that if one side was attacked by a third country the other side must go all out to provide military and other assistance."³³ Thus, by 1950 both Stalin and Mao had committed to support each other militarily, a commitment which had not existed when Kim first requested combat operations. How did the Sino-Soviet treaty affect both Mao and Stalin's decisions regarding the Korean War?

²⁹ Ibid., 71.

³⁰ Ibid., 75.

³¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 64.

³² Ibid., 83.

³³ Ibid.

While October 1, 1949, marked the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the civil war continued. This period was marked by diverging strategies between Mao and Stalin. Mao's concerns focused on removing the remainder of the KMT, holed up on Taiwan, and on seeking international recognition of the new PRC government.³⁴ To mount a successful operation against Taiwan, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) sought Soviet military aid. Several factors caused Stalin to voice his disapproval of an invasion of Taiwan. First, he feared conflict with the US Navy.³⁵ Second, and not entirely consistently, Stalin was also concerned that a Chinese victory on Taiwan could open "relations with the United States."³⁶ It appears that Stalin used Kim's desire to reunify the Korean peninsula to prevent Mao from eliminating the last bastion of the KMT and allow for the possibility of normalized relations between the United States and China.

Changes in American foreign policy relating to East Asia may have attributed to Stalin's ultimate approval of Kim's war plans. By early 1949, it was clear to American officials that the KMT was unlikely to win the civil war and began to implement a strategy that would seek diplomatic relations with China in the hope of keeping Soviet influence at bay.³⁷ The American "wedge" strategy focused on decreasing diplomatic and military support to the KMT and working to establish a relationship with the CCP. Mao's June 30, 1949, "lean to one side" speech signaled to the United States that China was likely to fall under Soviet influence.³⁸ Mao and Stalin watched as military aid to the KMT dried up from the United States and the wedge strategy failed. While doubt still existed as to whether Washington would support the defense of Taiwan, the United States had abandoned mainland China. By 1950, communist leaders had to wonder, would the United States also abandon Korea?

One final possibility is that Stalin did not change his mind regarding Korea at all. In the September 1949 telegram denying combat operations in Korea, Stalin and the

³⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 64.

Soviet Politburo believed that the North Koreans were ill-prepared to go to war. The Soviets identified three critical failings of North Korea. First, the NKA was not equipped to defeat the South Koreans, especially if combat were to become a sustained endeavor. Second, politically North Korea had not sufficiently developed a “partisan movement” capable of undermining the South Korean regime. Finally, Stalin believed that if the North Koreans proved incapable of winning outright, it was likely that the United States would intervene to save the South.³⁹ It is possible that by May 1950 the shortcomings identified by the Soviets had been rectified to the point that Stalin was now convinced that Kim’s forces could prevail quickly enough to forestall American intervention. It is also possible that he had concluded that it did not matter, and that American intervention would not entail general war.

The Korean War supported Stalin’s strategic objectives in East Asia in two distinct ways. First, Stalin took exceptional steps to insure that any conflict in Asia would involve Chinese or North Korean military forces, not Soviet. Second, a war in Korea would further erode the already tense diplomatic relationship between the United States and China and ultimately bring China further under a Soviet sphere of influence. The changing political environment in China between Kim’s two requests for military action to unify Korea had forced Stalin into action. If Stalin failed to provide support to Kim, the North Korean leader would have looked to China for support. This support would have undoubtedly been provided, but likely after Mao had completed the elimination of the KMT with the capture of Taiwan. Stalin likely viewed that with the complete eradication of the KMT the United States would have no other option than to diplomatically recognize the PRC and work for normalized relations. Renewed Sino-American relations, Stalin feared, may have led to significant political and strategic shifts along the Soviet periphery and even seen growing American influence as a direct threat to Moscow. Thus Stalin decision to allow Kim to move forward with military operations in 1950 was designed to forestall the diplomatic normalization of China with Western

³⁹ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo, “September 24, 1949 Politburo Decision to Confirm the Following Directive to the Soviet Ambassador in Korea.”

nations. Subsequently, Stalin forced the PRC further into the Soviet sphere of influence by forcing military aid to Korea and pitting Mao against the United States.

II. COMPETITION FOR CHINA: EAST ASIAN POLITICAL BALANCE

A. INTRODUCTION

Before Kim Il-sung's September 1949 request for unification on the Korean peninsula was initiated, a strategic shift in East Asia was developing that would ultimately lead to the Korean War in 1950. The period following World War II saw the global development of American and Soviet spheres of influence. In late 1948, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would find itself in the middle of the power struggle between capitalist and socialist camps led by the Americans and Soviets, respectively. The CCP's initial handling of American diplomats in China would have lasting ramifications and eroded diplomatic relations that could have eased tensions prior to the Korean War.⁴⁰ The CCP's decision to apply Soviet guidance during critical international diplomatic meetings further moved China into the Soviet sphere of influence and into Joseph Stalin's strategic global vision.

The erosion of relations between the United States and the CCP was not guaranteed; the United States took several approaches to smooth diplomatic tensions and attempt to pull China away from Soviet influence and establish a new balance of power in East Asia.⁴¹ The interactions between American diplomats Angus Ward and John Leighton Stuart and CCP leaders, however, eradicated the possibility for formal relations between the United States and China. Further driving the two countries apart was Mao's decision to openly align with the Soviet Union on international politics. Mao accelerated his move toward Soviet support by dispatching a delegation to discuss political and strategic objectives for both the Soviet Union and China in East Asia. Led by Liu Shaoqi in 1949, the summer trip to Moscow served as a critical framework for Mao's visit later that year; this visit would end with the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship,

⁴⁰ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 32.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, vol. 9 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1945), 13.

Allegiance, and Mutual Assistance and set the ground work for the Korean War.⁴² This chapter will explore how CCP and American diplomatic meetings dissolved the Sino-U.S. ties in China, illustrate how Mao's decision to align with the Soviet Union changed the political scenario in East Asia, and discuss how Liu's trip to China was the foundational step to renegotiate the Sino-Soviet Alliance.

B. DIPLOMATIC SEPARATION: WARD AND STUART

In early November 1948, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had advanced into the large city of Shenyang in northeast China. With the military task of securing the city complete, PLA commanders turned to the far less certain task of diplomatic relations. The American consul general Angus Ward had remained in the city with only vague direction from the United States State Department. According to Chen Jian, Ward had remained "not because of any willingness to reach an accommodation with the new Chinese Communist regime, but only in order to observe the Communist controlled zones without arousing misunderstandings about formal recognition."⁴³ The Chinese interaction with Ward "would create a point of serious conflict, finally leading to a direct Sino-American military confrontation in late 1950."⁴⁴

Initial diplomatic contact between the Communist and American diplomats occurred three days after the military operation in Shenyang on November 5, 1948. Zhu Qiwen, the new mayor, summoned American, British, and French consuls promising that "Communist authorities in Shenyang would protect the foreigners remaining there."⁴⁵ It was apparent that the communist Chinese were willing to deal with American diplomats in their official capacity, despite the fact that the United States continued to recognize the Kuomintang (KMT) as the legitimate government of China. Zhu was following guidance from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that had been provided by Central Committee member Zhou Enlai in a November 1 telegram. In the telegram Zhou informed the

⁴² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 51.

⁴³ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

party's Northeast Bureau that American, British, and Soviet consulates were to be protected. Furthermore, neither personnel nor the consulates themselves would be searched.⁴⁶

Zhou, along with other senior members of the Central Committee, recognized the inexperience of CCP diplomats and would seek advice from their more experienced communist neighbor: the Soviet Union. Zhou emphasized that diplomatic advice from the Soviet Union would be treated as suggestions and would not necessarily reflect changes in policy. Any policy matters, Zhou emphasized, were to be reported to the Central Committee for deliberation and subsequent instructions.⁴⁷ While it appears that the CCP was indeed willing to work with the United States diplomatically, they remained cautious. The strongest ally to the CCP at the time was the Soviet Union. Thus, from the earliest point of diplomatic relations between the Chinese communists and the United States, Stalin found himself in a position to manipulate that relationship to advance Soviet foreign policy into East Asia.

Much of the Soviet Union's advice with respect to the United States would come from I.V. Kovalev. Dispatched to China in June 1948, Kovalev was responsible for the reconstruction of the Chinese railroads in northeast China. In addition to providing technical support for the rebuilding of the railroad system, Kovalev had been tasked by Stalin to "ascertain the Chinese leader's...policy toward the United States."⁴⁸ In early November, CCP leaders sought Kovalev's advice regarding Angus Ward and the American consulate in Shenyang. Giving assistance only, not official guidance to avoid providing an official Soviet government stance on the matter, Kovalev advised them to "isolate the U.S. consul general and do not let...employees outside; if the Chinese comrades are certain there are radio transmitters at any location that are continuing to operate, confiscate them."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

Acting on the suggested advice, the PLA isolated the consulate and placed Ward under house arrest on November 20, 1948. Ward, however, refused to provide the Chinese with the consulate's radio transmitter.⁵⁰ Stalin asked Kovalev, who had returned to Moscow by December 1948, why the transmitter had not been confiscated. Kovalev responded, "I have detected an interesting tendency among the Chinese comrades. They do not want to quarrel with the Americans; they want us to quarrel with them."⁵¹ Stalin had achieved his initial goal; the Ward affair had hardened relations between the United States and China. Stalin remained unconvinced of Mao's loyalties, and he was concerned that the Chinese leader might continue to seek diplomatic relations with the United States in the future.

By April 1949, the PLA had made significant military advances and appeared likely to triumph in the civil war; with this strategic change, Mao pushed his relationship with Stalin further by establishing contacts with American diplomats. Zhou informed Kovalev in mid-April that American Ambassador Leighton Stuart had remained in the Nationalist capital of Nanking. Communist forces entered the American embassy early on April 25, waking Stuart, and rummaged through his personal effects. When Stuart cabled to Washington on April 29, he claimed the Chinese were arrogant and that, despite the intrusion, the United States should not be quick to act.⁵² American reaction to the intrusion on the embassy only served to solidify the American position, and any possibility of early recognition of the CCP would not be considered. While serving a diplomatic and ideological symbol to the international community, the American decision of not recognizing the CCP as the legitimate government in China risked pushing Mao further toward the Soviet influential sphere.

By early May 1949, both the United States and the CCP had eased their positions slightly. Although the United States remained cautious regarding recognition of the CCP, Secretary of State Dean Acheson provided Stuart guidance for upcoming diplomatic talks with the CCP. According to Acheson, "the new Chinese government must exercise

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 35.

⁵² U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, 13.

effective control over its territory, recognize its international obligations, and have the general acquiescence of its people.”⁵³ Mao believed that open discussions with the United States, through Stuart, would sever the KMT from aid and lead to official recognition of the CCP as the legitimate government in China. Thus, in a similar way as Acheson, Mao provided his guidance for the upcoming talks to the Chinese representative Huang Hua, head of Foreign Affairs Office of the Military Control Committee. Mao informed Huang that the United States needed to cease support of to the KMT and remain out of China’s internal affairs.⁵⁴

With both Stuart and Huang provided with the requirements of their respective political leaders, secret meetings began on May 13, 1949. The discussion was courteous, but gained little ground. Both Stuart and Huang simply stated the principles of their respective governments. According to Chen, “Stuart emphasized the legitimacy of American interests in China and tried to convince the Chinese Communists that they had to change their behavior and accept widely recognized international regulations and principles.”⁵⁵ Huang, however, informed Stuart that the United States must sever all relations with the KMT before any serious recognition discussions could continue.⁵⁶

Stuart and Huang met again on June 6, 1949. Neither diplomat had changed his views, thus the meeting again ended in stalemate. Huang did extend an invitation to Stuart to travel to Peiping to meet with the Chinese Communist leadership, to include Mao. In his telegram to Acheson, Stuart indicated that if he were to accept the invitation the trip “would undoubtedly be gratifying to them [Mao, Zhou, and Huang]...would give me a change to describe American policy...and enable me to carry to Washington most authoritative information regarding CCP intentions.”⁵⁷ Stuart also outlined the potential negative aspects, namely the diplomatic fallout resulting from the perceived shift in

⁵³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 13.

⁵⁴ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1945), 745.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 766.

American foreign policy from the KMT to the CCP.⁵⁸ Stuart considered the political risk of the visit worthwhile and hoped that his visit could deescalate the continued tension surrounding Ward's continued house arrest. Secretary Acheson's answer to Stuart left no room for doubt: "Following highest level consideration...you are instructed under no circumstances to make visit Peiping."⁵⁹

Both the Ward and Stuart meetings with CCP diplomats shed differing light on early relations between the United States and Communist China. The CCP initial decision to recognize the authority of Consul General Ward were likely in hopes of establishing themselves as the new benevolent government of China. When Ward and his fellow Western consuls did not sever connections with the KMT immediately, the attitude of the CCP changed. Furthermore, the influence of Soviet diplomats helped motivate CCP leaders to not only deny the diplomatic status of Ward, but place him under house arrest. For Stalin, these actions by the CCP created tension between Mao and the Truman Administration. The initial earnest meeting between CCP and American diplomats, however, generated great concern for Stalin about keeping Chinese communists under his sphere of influence.

The diplomatic discussions between Stuart and Huang represented Stalin's biggest concern regarding the easing of tensions between the two powers. However, to Stalin's relief, both the United States and China were unwilling to make major diplomatic or strategic shifts. Thus, the discussions proved to be unproductive. The United States' policy toward China underwent changes as it became more likely that the CCP would emerge victorious in the civil war. However, Acheson was unwilling to allow the appearance of open support of the CCP with a visit by the American Ambassador to China. The visit was also rendered moot with a strategic shift in Chinese foreign policy. On June 30, 1949, in the middle of the Stuart-Huang discussions, Mao issued his "'leaning to one side' statement, announcing that the new China would support the Soviet

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 769.

Union in international affairs” and signaling a momentous global shift in the Sino-Soviet relationship.⁶⁰

C. MAO’S BIG DECISION: LEANING TO ONE SIDE

Mao’s June 1949 decision to seek alignment with the Soviet Union would be the catalyst that would drive the formation of the Sino-Soviet Alliance in February 1950. On June 30, 1949, Mao’s statement was broadcasted over CCP radio transmitters. His speech outlined that the CCP must “ally ourselves with the Soviet Union, with the People’s Democratic Countries, and with the proletariat and the broad masses...and form an international united front...We must lean to one side.”⁶¹ Mao’s decision was based not only on shared communist ideology with the Soviet Union, but also an assessment of the security concerns in East Asia. By the late 1940s, CCP leaders had undoubtedly perceived the global strategic pattern developing. Two camps had clearly emerged out of the postwar period: the Soviet Union and the United States. Mao was confident that the international struggle between the two powers would likely involve China; thus it was clear that he needed to decide “between the Soviet-led progressive camp and the American-led reactionary camp.”⁶²

Mao, however, attempted to balance a now-open relationship with the Soviet Union and continued to seek diplomatic communication with the United States. CCP representatives contacted Ambassador Stuart, who would remain in China until August 2, 1949, in early July in hope of salvaging the opportunity to open relations between the two countries. Mao’s attempt served two political objectives. First, by approaching the American ambassador, Mao could send a message to Stalin that China, despite the announcement to side with the Soviet Union, had other prospective opportunities to pursue its own goals. Mao knew that any meeting with Stuart would be relayed to Stalin via Kovalev.⁶³ Mao was implying that if the Soviet Union could not, or would not,

⁶⁰ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 57.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 54.

support the CCP, then perhaps the Americans would. This would surely catch the attention of Stalin and hopefully reinforce the level of commitment he would provide to Communist China. According to *Uncertain Partners*, “Mao’s leaning-to-one-side policy was thus intended primarily to serve his goal of national revival, not fundamentally to align his foreign policy with ‘proletarian internationalism’ or the will of Moscow. For this reason, the policy did not preclude attempts to establish limited relations with the United States or other Western nations.”⁶⁴

The second political objective Mao could gain by sending representatives to Stuart was indeed to open relations with the United States, despite the ‘lean to one side’ speech. On July 9, 1949, Mao’s emissary notified Stuart of Mao’s speech on June 30.⁶⁵ It is conceivable that Stuart was already aware of Mao’s speech. Furthermore, it is also likely that Acheson denied Stuart’s trip to visit Mao based on his speech. Mao’s emissary, however, told Stuart that the new CCP policy did not “exclude the possibility of establishing economic and diplomatic ties with the United States.”⁶⁶ The emissary urged Stuart to see the difference between the communist party and the state’s political agendas. Stuart, who likely recognized the duplicity Mao’s trying to play to both the Soviet Union and American at the same time, disregarded the request. It was clear that Mao’s decision to lean toward the Soviet Union had taken its toll on the potential for Sino-American relations.⁶⁷

D. PRELUDE TO NEGOTIATIONS: LIU SHAOQI IN MOSCOW

In April 1949, the PLA crossed the Yangtze River and continued to push back KMT forces. It was clear that a Communist victory was inevitable. In an effort to solidify relations between the CCP and the Soviet Union, Mao informed Kovalev that he wished to fly to Moscow and talk with Stalin.⁶⁸ Stalin was undoubtedly concerned about the international ramifications of Mao’s visit at that time. Although the CCP had made

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62.

significant progress in its civil war, the recognized government of China remained the KMT. Openly allowing Mao to visit could be seen as implicit Soviet involvement in China's internal struggle. Furthermore, the United States had begun distancing themselves from the KMT earlier that year.⁶⁹ Stalin was not about to risk a revival of American support for the KMT if Truman believed that the CCP had Soviet military backing. Thus, Stalin denied Mao's request to visit Moscow.⁷⁰

Although Mao would remain in China, a CCP Politburo meeting in May 1949 determined a delegation, headed by Liu Shaoqi, would visit Moscow. The diplomatic mission was designed to pave the way for strategic cooperation between the two communist nations.⁷¹ Liu, having been thoroughly briefed by both Mao and Zhou, left China with three main goals to discuss with Soviet leaders. First, he would provide current information regarding combat operations in the civil war. Liu would let Stalin know that the combat effectiveness of the PLA had increased during the period of conflict and the armed forces were becoming quite capable. Second, Liu would indicate how the revolutionary movement was advancing within China and how that could be applied to other nations within Asia. Mao was undoubtedly hoping to show Stalin how the CCP could be a pivotal player in a global revolutionary movement. Finally, and most importantly, "his foremost task would be to elicit Soviet understanding and sympathy and to gain the USSR's assistance and international support for China after the PLA's victory."⁷²

In an effort to show the commitment of the delegation's visit to further Sino-Soviet relations, Mao released his "lean to one side" speech just ten days before Liu departed for Moscow on July 10, 1949. It is clear that Mao wanted to provide Stalin every level of assurance that China was firmly committed to the Soviet Union and not seeking to align with the United States. Upon his arrival in Moscow, Liu informed Stalin that a CCP victory in China was all but assured. Even if imperialists intervened, he

⁶⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 11.

⁷⁰ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 62.

⁷¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 71.

⁷² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 64.

explained, it could not change the outcome.⁷³ Liu declared that even if the United States were to dispatch a force of over one hundred thousand the CCP was prepared and could withstand the onslaught.⁷⁴

Having presented Stalin information regarding the civil war, Liu moved to his second task of increasing the relevance of the Chinese revolutionary movement in Asia. According to Thornton, “Liu asked Stalin if China ‘could become a member of the Cominform.’”⁷⁵ Stalin considered the acceptance of China into the Cominform unnecessary. Stalin argued that the historical differences between revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe and China were significant, and that policies in one country might not be recognized in the other. Stalin did suggest that perhaps China could create a similar organization for East Asian communist parties.⁷⁶ In all likelihood, Stalin did not want to create a veto capability for China if accepted into the Cominform.⁷⁷ This decision by Stalin continues to show that his foreign policy remained focused primarily on Europe and not on East Asia.

Another critical item discussed by Liu and Stalin during their first meeting revolved around the recognition of the People’s Republic by foreign countries. Liu outlined that it was the hope of the CCP that the Soviet Union would be the first country to recognize a new communist China. Recognition, Liu explained, would not be limited only to communist nations. In a statement sure to gain Stalin’s attention, Liu stated “China would never agree to any recognition that would ‘tie our hands and feet,’ but ‘if the imperialist states choose a policy of recognition of the new government of China, then we shall be prepared to establish diplomatic relations with them.’”⁷⁸ Regarding the existing treaty between China and the Soviet Union, Liu informed Stalin that the CCP

⁷³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 34.

⁷⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 65.

⁷⁵ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 34. Comprised of European communist nations, the Cominform, was an international communist agency founded to advance propaganda and encourage international communist solidarity.

⁷⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 233.

⁷⁷ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 34.

⁷⁸ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 65.

was “prepared to ‘examine them anew and to solve any issues on a case by case basis.’”⁷⁹ By bringing up the treaty, it was clear to Stalin that Mao was not interested in renegotiating the 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty, but in creating an entirely new alliance between the two countries.

The following day, July 11, Stalin again met with Liu and the Chinese delegation. According to Chen Jian in *China’s Road to the Korean War*, Stalin began the second meeting by apologizing to Liu. In that meeting Stalin claimed that the Soviet Union had hindered the progress of the Chinese revolution because “our knowledge about China is too limited.”⁸⁰ When word of Stalin’s apology reached Mao, he was impressed. For the CCP leadership, it was becoming clear that Stalin no longer considered the Chinese communists as inferiors but as equals.⁸¹ The apology, coming only eleven days after Mao’s ‘lean to one side’ speech, further tightened the bond between China and the Soviet Union. China was becoming firmly entrenched in the Soviet sphere of influence in East Asia.

Following the apology, Stalin moved to discuss the recognition of the Communist regime in China. Stalin assured the CCP leaders present that “as soon as the new China is established, the Soviet Union will recognize it.”⁸² Regarding the change of the 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty that had been established under the Nationalist government, Stalin was not ready to discuss changes. The still-recognized ruling party for China was the KMT; Stalin had to balance his allegiance to the CCP against international perception of violating the Yalta Accords by supporting the Communists in a revolutionary movement.⁸³ Stalin informed Liu that once the CCP was victorious, Mao could travel to Moscow and the treaty could be discussed at that time. Stalin had successfully stalled on the treaty issue and was thus able to devise a strategy for the eventual treaty negotiations that would occur in early 1950.

⁷⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 34.

⁸⁰ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 72.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 66.

⁸³ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 52.

Despite the apparent conciliatory nature of Stalin during his second meeting with Liu, he was not willing to support all of the Chinese requests. Regarding the stationing of Soviet troops at Port Arthur, Stalin was reluctant to remove the forces as the Chinese desired. Stalin argued, “The Soviet troops deployed in Port Arthur are the freedom force that is deterring the military forces of America and Chiang Kai-shek.”⁸⁴ Regarding the removal of troops from Port Arthur, Stalin provided Liu a counteroffer. The Soviet troops would continue to remain until a successful peace treaty between Washington and Tokyo was established and American troops withdrew from Japan. Stalin was also unwilling to remove Soviet troops from both Manchuria and the port of Dairen. According to Soviet diplomat M.S. Kapista,

one of the most serious reasons for Stalin’s distrust of Mao was Lushun [and] Dalian...Mao was very much encouraged by his overall victory [in the revolution] and because of that, wanted to have everything returned immediately. Stalin was asking Mao to look at the international situation and the desperate state of affairs in China and evaluate correctly the American threat.⁸⁵

Stalin continued to have a global security focus and looked to avoid a possible conflict with the United States. Mao, on the other hand, believed that his current victories against the KMT would like dissuade the Americans from involvement in China.

Liu then changed tactics and instead requested Soviet support for the liberation of Taiwan. Stalin was again adamant in denying such a request. While American forces were unlikely to commit ground forces to mainland China, the island of Taiwan was a different matter. The invasion of Taiwan, in Stalin’s mind, “would risk a fight with the U.S. Navy and Air Force and provide a pretext for unleashing a world war.”⁸⁶ Stalin did not voice his concerns based on the possible conflict with the Americans, but instead claimed that “the Russian people would not understand...if we undertake this.”⁸⁷ The inflexible attitude toward Taiwan, Port Arthur, and Dalian indicates that when his own

⁸⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 67.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁷ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 35.

strategic priorities were at risk Stalin was unwilling to discuss changes with the CCP delegation. When his priorities aligned with Mao's, however, Stalin was willing to cooperate and provide necessary assistance.⁸⁸

While the July 11 meeting was seen poorly by Liu and his delegation, the July 27 meeting with Stalin would lead to a drastically more positive attitude between the Soviet and CCP leaders. Liu opened by withdrawing the request to conduct the invasion of Taiwan.⁸⁹ By no means had Mao and the CCP abandoned the desire to take the island, but the PLA was for the time being in no condition to conduct an amphibious landing of the magnitude required to assault Taiwan. Thus, Liu "formally requested, and Stalin agreed to provide long-term Soviet assistance in the modernization of China's air and naval forces, and of its defense industry."⁹⁰ Over the next several months, Soviet military advisors arrived in China to assist in the further development of the PLA. Mao could remain relatively optimistic with these results. Stalin, it appeared, was willing to the eventual invasion of Taiwan, just not now. The Chinese would have to wait.

E. CONCLUSION

Despite initial positive response to American diplomats in China, the CCP abruptly shifted to a policy of hostility toward Washington. Chinese leadership, with the assistance from Soviet advisors, chose to sever formal communications with Western consulates. By placing American consul Angus Ward under house arrest, the CCP chose a path of antagonism with the United States that would last for the next several decades. Thus, the degradation of ties with the United States led to a shift of the CCP toward the Soviet Union. Stalin had manipulated Mao to accomplish two critical strategic objectives. First, by essentially forcing Beijing and Washington to sever relations, Stalin forced a change of U.S. foreign policy in Asia from alignment to containment. Second, Mao had been left little choice but to openly support the Soviet Union and fall in line with Stalin's objectives in East Asia.

⁸⁸ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 70.

⁸⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

The success of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assurance in 1950 was based largely on the successful talks between Liu Shaoqi and Joseph Stalin in July 1949. Liu's mission to Moscow had a mixed result. The Soviet Union had agreed to provide military support to bolster the fledging PLA navy and air forces, critical elements in any amphibious operation.⁹¹ Stalin had effectively raised the level of the Chinese communists to a near diplomatic equal with the Soviet Union. Although Liu's request to have the CCP join the Cominform was denied, Stalin recognized the value of Mao's revolutionary movement in East Asia. Stalin would look to the CCP to advance the socialist movement to the East while he continued to focus on Eastern Europe. Stalin also assured Liu that the Soviet Union would be the first to recognize the new CCP government of China when the time came.

Indeed, on October 2, 1949, one day after Mao announced the CCP as the new government of China, Stalin upheld his promise and the Soviet Union became the first government to recognize the People's Republic of China. The Liu-Stalin talks in the summer of 1949 set the framework for the upcoming talks between Mao and Stalin. Liu was able to provide information regarding Stalin's global strategic and political priorities to Mao. Mao's priorities, however, were focused on the completion of his revolutionary movement in China and he did not take into account his actions in Stalin's grand scheme. If Mao had looked further beyond the borders of China, perhaps he would have seen how the creation of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, built on the framework of Liu's trip to Moscow, would ultimately lead to the Korean War.

⁹¹ Ibid.

III. THE SINO-SOVIET ALLIANCE: PRELUDE TO WAR

A. INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant political events between Stalin's September 1949 decision to deny Kim Il-sung's request for unification and his eventual approval in May of 1950 for what would become the Korean War was the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in February 1950.⁹² The treaty, which affirmed the political and military support of the two largest communist nations, had a major impact on the United States and other capitalist nations in the earliest stages of the Cold War. Relations between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China appeared to be cooperative, thus American foreign policy would ultimately shift to balance the perceived communist threat.⁹³ Yet within the communist nations, uncooperative relations as well as personal friction and manipulation between Mao and Stalin were present from the beginning.

Although the personal differences of Mao and Stalin were significant enough to undermine possible security and political assurances between the two nations, it was evident that both leaders were dependent on each other to meet strategic objectives.⁹⁴ Mao's victory in the Chinese Civil War was nearing completion, but he needed Soviet military support to retake Taiwan and eliminate the Kuomintang. From Stalin's point of view, he needed to expand the buffer zones of the Soviet Union into East Asia. Furthermore, Stalin sought to isolate China from Western nations, especially the United States.⁹⁵ It is with these political objectives in mind that the two leaders met in Moscow to discuss the future of both nations. This chapter will discuss the initial frictions between Mao and Stalin, Mao's decision to force Stalin into action, and the formal negotiations of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

⁹² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 83.

⁹³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 54.

⁹⁴ Shen, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War," 46.

⁹⁵ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 121.

B. THE FIRST MEETING OF STALIN AND MAO

Despite victory in the Chinese Civil War, recognition by the Soviet Union, and near elimination of Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT), Mao Zedong's December 16, 1949, arrival in Moscow showed that continued animosity surrounded the two senior communist heads of state. The official party that greeted Mao at the Soviet train station did not include Stalin. Mao's invitation for the party to join in a small drink was quickly snubbed under the premise of protocol. Mao was also not permitted to give his welcome speech, ostensibly due to the cold weather. The speech text was instead handed over for publication. All and all, the arrival of the Chinese leader was met with layers of personal tension, a trend that would continue for most of Mao's stay in Moscow.⁹⁶

Later that evening, Mao and Stalin, along with most of the Soviet Politburo, met at the Kremlin for the first time. Although initial greetings were cordial enough, tension between the leaders was palpable. Mao, according to his translator Shi Zhe, had been disappointed with the Soviet support toward the CCP and "longed for a personal apology from Stalin."⁹⁷ The lack of outright support of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the revolution continued to bother Mao. He regarded Stalin's public recognition of the KMT during the revolution as an insult to the CCP. Furthermore, Mao wanted Stalin to treat him as an equal and not an inferior.⁹⁸ Stalin had apologized to Liu Shaoqi during their July negotiations and Mao was hoping for the same; it was clear that Stalin would not apologize to Mao.⁹⁹

Realizing that an apology was not forthcoming, Mao continued to describe the success of the Chinese revolution and the CCP victory over the KMT. Stalin acknowledged and even congratulated Mao's victories, but then quickly shifted tactics to get down to business. Stalin asked, "You have come from afar, and it is not good for you

⁹⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 10.

⁹⁷ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 81.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 34.

to return empty-handed...what should we do now? Do you have any ideas or wishes?"¹⁰⁰ Mao, still hoping to save face before the Soviet leader, answered Stalin in roundabout way stating, "For this trip we hope to bring about something that not only looks nice but also tastes delicious."¹⁰¹ Stalin gave no answer. Sensing a level of confusion, Mao's translator stated that "Beautiful means of good shape and imposing: tasty means pleasant and substantial in content."¹⁰² Stalin still did not answer.

It is interesting that Mao chose this ambiguous phrase to raise the possibility of renegotiating the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1945. Stalin was already aware that Mao considered the treaty represented a major topic of discussion based on his previous meeting with Liu and Gao Gang in July.¹⁰³ Mao's decision ran the serious risk of being either misinterpreted or misunderstood. So why would Mao take such a risk? Mao was again trying to establish himself as an equal to Stalin. Instead of asking to amend the 1945 treaty directly, Mao wanted Stalin to bring up the subject first. This tactic would alleviate the appearance of Mao seeking favors from Stalin.¹⁰⁴ Another possible explanation for Mao's choice of words was to avoid showing his real intentions surrounding treaty negotiations until he could ascertain Stalin's goals during their visit.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of Mao's tactic, it appeared to have backfired. Stalin likely saw through the verbal chaff and recognized Mao's desires for changes in the 1945 treaty, a treaty that exceedingly favored the Soviets.

Mao attempted to change his approach and asked Stalin if Zhou Enlai should join them in Moscow. This request for China's Premier to join them likely cinched Stalin's assumption that Mao indeed had treaty issues on his agenda. Stalin, again aware that this was looming, sought to deal with treaty negotiations directly with Mao and not the

¹⁰⁰ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 40.

¹⁰² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 86.

¹⁰³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 80.

capable negotiator Zhou.¹⁰⁶ According to Liu Xiao, former ambassador to the Soviet Union, “Stalin made it abundantly clear that he was unwilling to alter the Soviet sphere of influence defined at Yalta.”¹⁰⁷ Ultimately Stalin’s response to Mao’s statement on summoning Zhou attempted to cut through Mao’s cryptic talk to this point: “If we cannot make certain what we really want to work out, what is the use to call Zhou to come here?”¹⁰⁸

Mao, clearly surprised claimed that the CCP had been discussing the 1945 treaty since Liu’s return from Moscow. Stalin, while not completely disregarding the possibility of a change to the treaty, provided Mao with three options regarding the existing treaty. First, all parties could continue to uphold the current 1945 treaty between the Soviet Union and China. Stalin would likely consider his recognition of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 2, 1949, sufficient evidence that despite the KMT having signed the treaty, the PRC was now the authority in China. This proposal was the most advantageous to Stalin’s political and security concerns. The second option would be for changes to be made, but at some point undeclared in the future. Both sides recognized this approach as a stall tactic. Finally, Stalin outlined that the third option, the one most advantageous to Mao, would be to change the treaty immediately. Stalin argued that the Yalta Agreement forced him to make no changes to the 1945 treaty and that the first option was the only one available.¹⁰⁹

Signed in March 1945 by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, the Yalta Agreement was Stalin’s primary argument to avoid a change to the 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty. Stalin claimed that the 1945 treaty was derived from the Yalta Agreement and thus had the implied consent of the United States and England. Modifications to the 1945 treaty could thus undermine the Yalta Agreement, and give both the United States and England grounds to modify the treaty in their own ways. Stalin diplomatically stated that “we searched to find a way to modify the current treaty...while formally maintaining its

¹⁰⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 41.

provisions.”¹¹⁰ Stalin was indeed appealing to both sides. He signaled to Mao that he was willing to seek changes in the current treaty, but only if they still fell within the Yalta Agreement.

Mao had not anticipated how the Yalta Agreement would have prevented the change to the 1945 treaty between the Soviet Union and China. Indeed Mao claimed that “we had not taken into account the American and English positions... however, it is already becoming clear that the treaty should not be modified at the present time.”¹¹¹ Stalin had expertly convinced Mao that the current treaty should remain in place. Mao again requested that Zhou should come to Moscow in order to “decide the treaty question.”¹¹² It is unusual that after acknowledging that the 1945 treaty parameters should not be modified, Mao would then immediately request Zhou to come to Moscow to attempt to modify the very treaty that he agreed to maintain. Perhaps Mao’s mistrust of Stalin signaled deception.

Stalin’s argument was indeed a ruse. He was claiming that changes to the Yalta Agreement, namely Soviet troops stationed in Port Arthur, could allow the United States and England to lay possible claim to the Kuriles and South Sakhalin.¹¹³ Stalin hoped to keep troops stationed in Port Arthur and retain access to the warm water port. In an effort to alleviate some of Mao’s concerns, however, Stalin did claim that in two years he would remove his troops if China wished. Stalin’s error regarding the Yalta Agreement as cause for retaining the 1945 treaty with China is clear enough. Richard Thornton notes in *Odd Man Out*, “The 1945 treaty derived from Yalta, to be sure, but the treaty had nothing to do legally or otherwise with the Soviet position in the Kuriles or South Sakhalin. Neither one is mentioned in the [Sino-Soviet] treaty, although both are mentioned in the Yalta Agreement.”¹¹⁴ This was not Stalin making a mistake in his interpretation of the Yalta Agreement. Nor does this represent a desire for Stalin to adhere to the agreement

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

signed by the other Allied leaders, for he had violated Yalta in his active support of the CCP against the KMT. What Stalin hoped to gain through this tactic was to provide a legal rationale to Mao why he could not change the 1945 treaty, despite his appearance to do so. Stalin was keenly aware that Zhou would likely see through this obvious gap in logic, and strove to keep him far away in China.¹¹⁵

Mao and Stalin walked away from their first personal meeting feeling the same sentiments of tension and distrust that is evident in their earlier correspondence. Mao had failed to gain an apology from Stalin for his lack of support during the Chinese revolution. Additionally, through face saving efforts to refuse to bring up the possibility of a new treaty, Mao had added a level of confusion to the talks that ultimately ended up solidifying Stalin's unwillingness to negotiate. Stalin, on the other hand, had convinced Mao that the treaty could not be altered due to the accords drawn up at Yalta. Further solidifying his bargaining position, Stalin had kept Zhou Enlai out of Moscow. The tension between the two leaders would result in little accomplishment between the nations during the early portion of Mao's visit to the Soviet Union.

C. MAO'S CHANGE IN TACTICS

Following the disappointing first meeting with Stalin, Mao spent the five days in virtual isolation. During this period, attempts to communicate between the two communist leaders failed to gain any headway for either nation. Although Soviet Politburo members did visit Mao at his temporary Moscow residence, they were either unwilling or unable to take Mao's requests seriously. Mao's desire to open trade beyond socialist countries and possibly the United States, whether real or not, sparked a notable change in Stalin's attitude toward a new treaty between the Soviet Union and China.

Mao's political and near total isolation in Moscow forced him to exert pressure toward Stalin in the only remaining fashion available. Mao was relatively certain that Stalin monitored the telegrams being sent from Moscow to Beijing. This became Mao's only method of communicating his intentions to Stalin. In a risky maneuver, for he had already pledged support to his fellow communists in the Soviet Union, Mao dispatched a

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

telegram on December 19, 1949, to Liu and Zhou. This telegram would have two momentous outcomes. First, the telegram would lead to the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and China. Second, the information contained in the transmission would ultimately lead to the Korean War.¹¹⁶

Mao's cable established the possibility of diplomatic relations with Burma, but it did not end there.¹¹⁷ Mao instructed Liu and Zhou that they should answer the request of the Burmese government for recognition in a return telegram demanding that Burma sever all ties with the KMT. If Burma was willing to do this, then they could dispatch representatives to Beijing to discuss the possibility of recognition.¹¹⁸ It was clear that Mao was only willing to extend diplomatic recognition to nations that had accepted the CCP as the legitimate authority in China. The telegram further indicates Mao's objective stating, "It is necessary that we should go through this procedure of discussion, and we should act in the same way toward all capitalist countries. If a certain capitalist country openly announces the desire to establish diplomatic relations with us, our side should telegraph that country and request that it dispatch its representative to China for discussions about establishing diplomatic relations."¹¹⁹

This telegram put a great deal of pressure on Stalin to act. Diplomatic relations between China and the United States represented a massive strategic failure. The loss of China as part of the Eastern Bloc would deprive the Soviet Union of its strategic buffer zone in East Asia. Furthermore, Stalin could see the loss of the Soviet satellite nation of North Korea. Stalin was already aware that both India and Great Britain planned to recognize the CCP in short order, could the United States be far behind? Additionally, it is likely that Stalin was aware of Washington's change in foreign policy removing

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁷ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 19.

¹¹⁸ Mao Zedong, "Telegram, Mao Zedong to Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai," December 19, 1949, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110397>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

support of the KMT and considering the possibility of recognizing the CCP.¹²⁰ Stalin's greatest strategic fear could easily come true; he had to act.

It is perhaps for this reason that on December 21, 1949, Mao was afforded the most honorable seat next to Stalin during his birthday celebration. Although Mao gave a speech celebrating the Soviet leader, it is reported that the two spoke very little and that Mao was “‘gloomy and unresponsive’ to attempts by others to engage him in conversation.”¹²¹ This would not be surprising. Mao's cable likely sparked movement by the Soviet leadership, but Mao himself was unaware of the level of reaction.

Seating Mao in the place of honor during the birthday celebration also signaled to the world that Stalin held Mao in high esteem. Stalin was well aware that showing Mao in a positive light would serve two purposes. First, he could play upon Mao's ego and attempt to gain some concessions from the Chinese leader and praise from the CCP elites. Second, and more importantly, Stalin would show the world that Mao and Stalin were not only discussing the future of both countries, but that the relationship between the two was excellent.¹²² Stalin knew that, by allying himself openly with Mao at the birthday celebration, he would make policy makers in Washington hesitant to shift support to the CCP.

Up to this point it was unlikely that Mao understood the impact of his December 19 telegram on Stalin's global strategy. The December 22 telegram would push Stalin to the point of action. During Mao's visit to Moscow, he had been notified that East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia were willing “to do business with [China].”¹²³ Thus, in his telegram response to this news, Mao stated, “In addition, we have done business or are going to business with Britain, Japan, the United States, India and other countries.”¹²⁴ However, the telegram also included that “we should naturally give top

¹²⁰ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 46.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 90.

¹²³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 47.

¹²⁴ Mao Zedong, “Telegram, Mao Zedong to the Central Committee of the CCP,” December 22, 1949, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110389>.

priority to the Soviet Union.”¹²⁵ As Mao was aware that Stalin was most likely reading these telegrams, by showing ultimate support to Moscow he was still showing that he remained dedicated to the Soviet Union, at least for now.

Despite knowing that action had to be taken, Stalin kept Mao in suspense for nine more days. Then on January 1, 1950, Mao was handed an ‘interview’ for publication the next day, signed by Stalin. During the interview, “the essential message was summarized in one of Mao’s ‘responses’: the problem of the first importance under consideration are the existing Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, the Soviet loan to the People’s Republic of China, and trade and a trade pact between the two countries.”¹²⁶ That very evening Stalin dispatched senior politburo members Molotov and Mikoyan to Mao’s residence.¹²⁷

The meeting with Molotov and Mikoyan caught Mao off guard. After nearly two weeks in virtual isolation, Mao did not understand why Stalin was now willing to discuss changes in the treaty. Mao presented his three options to the senior Soviet Party members. First, Stalin and Mao could agree to sign a new treaty that would represent historic relations between the two countries against imperialist states. Second, the two governments could release a joint communique stating that they had “reached an identity of views on the important problems.”¹²⁸ This of course represented a delay in formal treaty relations. Finally, they could issue a statement on the critical points of bilateral agreements and relations. Molotov confirmed that the first choice was indeed the best. Mao, taken aback by his good fortune, looked to confirm that Zhou should come to Moscow. Molotov agreed that he should come.¹²⁹

Following the initial meeting with Stalin, Mao had likely seen his diplomatic mission in near shambles. Stalin had affirmed his desire to support the CCP but had declared himself unable to make new, formal agreements because of the terms of Yalta.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 92.

¹²⁷ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 48.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 82.

Mao then made what would become a tactically beneficial move to force Stalin's hand. By sending telegrams to the CCP leadership stating the desire to open diplomatic relations with any nation willing to cut ties with the KMT and sent representatives to China, including the United States, Mao showed his willingness to work with capitalist nations. Mao's decision could have dramatically changed the political environment in East Asia for years to come. Stalin needed to drive a wedge between China and the United States and he subsequently presented relations between Mao and himself in a drastically better light. By January 2, 1950, Stalin had agreed that Zhou Enlai should travel to Moscow.

D. ZHOU ENLAI AND THE SINO-SOVIET ALLIANCE

Mao Zedong sent word that Zhou Enlai should join him in Moscow in a January 2, 1950, telegram. Zhou was instructed to "finish all preparations... [and] depart from Beijing for Moscow by train (not by air) on 9 January."¹³⁰ Despite Mao's desire for Zhou to join him in treaty negotiations since the first meeting with Stalin, it seems that Mao was less concerned with Zhou's immediate arrival in the Soviet Union. According to Chen Jian in *China's Road to the Korean War* Mao had purposely delayed Zhou's arrival to indicate to Stalin that there was no need to hurry to negotiations.¹³¹ It is possible that Mao saw Stalin's agreement to renegotiate the treaty as a diplomatic victory and wished to keep the perceived political tide turned in China's favor. Regardless, the arrival of Zhou was the catalyst that formed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.

Although Zhou arrived in Moscow on January 20, 1950, he would not meet Stalin and begin treaty negotiations until January 22.¹³² The arrival of the Chinese Premier in the Soviet Union, as Stalin knew, would signal to the world that the Soviet Union and China were fast approaching an alliance. Indeed, both Zhou and Mao were anxious to begin working on the new treaty. As the basic principles of the treaty had already been

¹³⁰ Mao Zedong, "Telegram, Mao Zedong to the Central Committee of the CCP," January 2, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110390>.

¹³¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 83.

¹³² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 110.

agreed upon by both Stalin and Mao it was decided that Zhou, Mikoyan, and Vyshinsky would negotiate the primary alliance wording. Stalin remained uncertain as to which Chinese leader would sign a new treaty. Although Stalin wished for Mao to sign and accept all responsibility for the treaty, Mao had no intention of putting his signature to the document.¹³³ It is clear that tensions between Mao and Stalin had not eased with the opening of negotiations.

Mao began by commending cooperative relations between the Soviet Union and China “in order to prevent the resurgence of Japanese imperialism and renewed aggression by Japan or states that would align with Japan.”¹³⁴ Stalin, agreeing with Mao’s opening, then explained the topics that should be addressed: “the treaty of alliance; the agreements on the Chinese Changchun Railroad, Lushun, and Dalian, trade and trade agreements; loans; and cooperation in civil aviation.”¹³⁵ This statement indicated to the Chinese leadership that Stalin was willing to address the full range of issues that concerned them.

In what Mao hoped to be an accommodating position to Stalin, he accepted the Soviet leader’s previous position on retaining Russian troops in Lushun and Dalian. Stalin, however, surprised Mao with two options: remove the troops once a Sino-Japanese peace treaty was signed or withdraw the troops without changing the existing agreement.¹³⁶ Stalin also refused to allow Dalian to be a joint port. It was clear to Mao that Stalin’s statements were in stark contrast to not only his meeting with Liu six months ago, when he had agreed to joint tenancy at Dalian, but also violated the Yalta Agreement that had been so adamantly supported in his initial meeting with Mao only six weeks earlier.¹³⁷ To this obvious discrepancy Stalin responded, “The Sino-Soviet treaty must be a new treaty; the Yalta agreement should not determine it.”¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid., 110.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹³⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 92.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁸ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 112.

This odd change of goals for both delegations indicates three underlying motivations by the communist leaders. First, Mao was now willing to concede Soviet troops in Lushun and Dalian based upon the unequal agreements from Yalta. Secondly, abandoning the premise of the Yalta Agreement, Stalin sought to remove Soviet troops from China. Finally, by “formally divorcing the new treaty from Yalta, Stalin sought to demonstrate that the agreements then being worked out would result from China’s voluntary compliance and could never be legitimately overturned as an alleged ‘continuation of Yalta.’”¹³⁹ It appears that both Stalin and Mao had reversed their diplomatic and strategic goals. Although Mao and Stalin continued to distrust each other, this initial agreement on diplomatic matters created an environment that allowed both delegations to move forward toward a new alliance.

The international ramifications surrounding the Sino-Soviet Treaty become clear when compared with final versions of 1948 Soviet treaties with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. In the three 1948 treaties, the parties “would consult with each other on all the important international questions connected with the interests of both countries.”¹⁴⁰ Stalin was undoubtedly concerned with the interests of all Soviet Bloc nations, regardless of whether it affected the Soviet Union or not. This clause amounted to a tacit requirement to seek Soviet approval on all international questions. Chinese negotiators, however, modified this clause by stating, “Both Contracting Parties...will consult with each other in regard to all important international problems affecting the common interests of China and the Soviet Union.”¹⁴¹ This wording allowed Mao freedom to run China in a manner he saw fit, only seeking Soviet consultation when the risk of crossing Soviet interests existed.

One of the most significant differences between the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty and the new Sino-Soviet Alliance surrounded security obligations between the two countries. These security relations not only signified a change in the global strategic objectives between Stalin and Mao, but also laid the framework for both nations’ roles in the

¹³⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

upcoming Korean War. During the 1945 treaty discussions, the military threat to China remained focused on recently defeated Japan. The new treaty would be expanded to state, “Contracting Parties being attacked by Japan or any state allied with her and thus being involved in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal.”¹⁴² While not openly stated, it was known by both parties that the United States represented the ‘any state.’ Stalin, in his attempts to further drive apart cooperation between Beijing and Washington, failed to have the United States openly mentioned in the treaty.

Looking to further strengthen the military support between the Soviet Union and China, Zhou insisted on the phrase “by all means at its disposal.”¹⁴³ The wording the Chinese negotiator was seeking had not been included in the 1948 Eastern Bloc treaties, which instead had called for “military support and assistance with the means in its power.”¹⁴⁴ Two major changes accompany the Chinese wording change. First, the new treaty left little doubt that assistance would be swift in nature. The second change now implied a commitment of the Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal. It appears that Stalin did not significantly argue the wording changes, and both Mao and Zhou must have been pleased that the treaty involved the entirety of Soviet military support.

It appears that while the Chinese delegation was attempting to define aggressor nations and the subsequent military support that would result in the fulfillment of the treaty Stalin was focusing his efforts on the terms that would invoke Soviet involvement. The 1948 Eastern Bloc treaties were worded that “the obligation to render assistance would be triggered if either party found itself involved in a ‘military engagement’ with an aggressor.”¹⁴⁵ This was the same argument put forth in the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty. The new treaty now stated that either the Soviet Union or China would have to be “involved in a state of war” in order for the alliance to be triggered. Stalin’s word choice had made it much less likely that the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual

¹⁴² Ibid., 117.

¹⁴³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 97.

¹⁴⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 117.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Assistance would ever be invoked. State of war represented more than a term for a treaty; the term had an international legal definition requiring “a formal declaration of war”¹⁴⁶ between nations.

Along with the new Treaty of Friendship, an “Additional Agreement” was negotiated between both governments. The Additional Agreement protocol stated that “in the interests of ensuring the defense of both countries, China agreed not to allow the citizens of third countries to settle or to carry out any industrial, financial, trade, or other related activities in Manchuria and Xinjiang.”¹⁴⁷ While the Soviet Union agreed to the same third party industrial and trade restrictions, this was a devastating blow to China. The Additional Agreement constricted China’s economic and industrial development solely to Soviet support, and further isolated China from the Western nations. Stalin saw the Additional Agreement as fulfilling one of his primary strategic goals by creating a buffer zone along his East Asian front.¹⁴⁸ Adding insult to injury, the Additional Agreement had, at Stalin’s insistence, “declared that the treaty had crushed the aggressive plans of the American and Japanese imperialist.”¹⁴⁹

Mao had hoped to avoid direct criticism of the United States because he still thought it possible to improve relations with the Truman Administration. With both the treaty and Additional Agreement scheduled to be signed and released together, the inclusion of expressly anti-American language represented a failure from Mao’s point of view. Thus, on the morning of the treating signing date, “Mao sent instructions to the Politburo deleting all mention of the Additional Agreement...Mao had decided to keep secret the Additional Agreement.”¹⁵⁰ Once news of this maneuver reached Stalin, he was irate, and reportedly “put Mao on notice, warning him against perfidy by vilifying Tito and Yugoslav treachery”¹⁵¹ during the treaty signing banquet. It is clear that even though

¹⁴⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 97.

¹⁴⁷ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 121.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 99.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

both Mao and Stalin had agreed to changes in the relationship of their two countries, significant personal distrust remained palpable between the two men.

E. CONCLUSION

The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, together with the Additional Agreement, were signed on February 14, 1950.¹⁵² The treaty negotiations represent both Mao and Stalin's attempts to advance their own country's position relative to the other. Unfortunately for Mao, Stalin was in a significantly stronger bargaining position. The treaty negotiations began in an atmosphere of mistrust, resulting in a two week stalemate. Mao's desire to save face in front of the Soviet leader caused the initial meeting to linger with little opportunity to rectify the previous unequal treaty signed by the Nationalists in 1945. It would take a calculated and decisive action to break the silence.

Mao's decision to request increasing open relations with non-socialist countries forced Stalin into action. From Mao's point of view, Stalin's decision to act was a blessing. The previous treaty was to be eliminated, Soviet troops would leave Lushun, and financial and military aid was available to Mao, with the implied consent to eradicate the KMT on Taiwan. Military support between the two nations, should it prove necessary, now included the complete Soviet arsenal, including nuclear weapons.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the treaty had avoided any direct mentioning of the United States as a possible hostile nation. These represented impressive victories for Mao and the Chinese delegation.

Stalin, for his part, had made combat support to China within the treaty almost impossible to invoke unless a formal and legal declaration of war was issued.¹⁵⁴ The Additional Agreement also represented a Soviet victory by further expanding Soviet security buffer zones into East Asia.¹⁵⁵ Mao had succeeded in keeping its language

¹⁵² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 83.

¹⁵³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 117.

¹⁵⁴ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 97.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

secret, but its existence was sufficient to spoil whatever slim chance might have existed of repairing relations with the United States. Goncharov, et al., claim that, “From the West’s point of view...the treaty appeared to have welded together an awesome coalition for aggression.”¹⁵⁶ Mao left Moscow heading toward war in Korea, all according to Stalin’s plan.

¹⁵⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 121.

IV. DRIVING THE WEDGE

A. INTRODUCTION

Although preparations for the new Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance were progressing in early 1950, Joseph Stalin still had his doubts about Mao Zedong's foreign policy. Mao's policy was open to diplomatic relations with any nation willing to recognize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and sever all ties to Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party (KMT).¹⁵⁷ Stalin was concerned that the United States might take this opportunity to open diplomatic talks with China. Mao's decision had the fortunate outcome of prompting Stalin to the negotiating table, but his ambitious plan put further tension between the two communist leaders. Could Stalin trust Mao to remain loyal to the Soviet Union and isolated from the United States? Nothing in these leaders' previous encounters had built a level of deep trust between Stalin and Mao. Thus, Stalin would continue efforts to drive China and the United States apart and implement a plan to bring about a war in Korea and draw China further into the Soviet orbit; but he certainly did not intend to fight that war himself.

B. SOVIET BOYCOTT OF THE UNITED NATIONS

On July 7, 1950, the United Nations (UN) Security Council released a resolution in reaction to hostilities on the Korean Peninsula. The UN resolution sought "prompt and vigorous support...to assist the Republic of Korea in defending itself against armed attack...[and] recommends that all Members providing military forces...make such forces and other assistance available to a unified command under the United States of America."¹⁵⁸ The Security Council's July 7 resolution proceeded through the voting process without any nation vetoing the action. Despite a permanent seat on the Security Council, the Soviet Union did not veto the UN military action in Korea because the Soviet Ambassador was not present for the vote. In fact, on Stalin's order, Soviet

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁸ "United Nations Resolution 84," United Nations Security Council, United Nations, accessed August 15, 2014, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/84\(1950\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/84(1950)).

Ambassador to the UN Jacob Malik had boycotted all meetings since January 13, 1950.¹⁵⁹

Stalin used the boycott of the UN to achieve two important political and strategic victories. First, Stalin placed Mao in the position to take the first action to demand the Chinese Security Council seat be transferred to the PRC. Mao likely saw this as an opportunity to show that China was not a subordinate of the Soviet Union and deserved its own seat with an equal vote. The immediate support that the Soviet Union displayed to Mao also enhanced relations between Moscow and Beijing during early disagreements in treaty negotiations. Second, Stalin's boycott decision would result in the Korean War falling under UN control, and not the United States. Stalin would continue to avoid a direct U.S.-Soviet conflict. China, on the other hand, would continue to be reliant on the Soviet Union, as the Sino-Soviet Treaty was unlikely to be invoked if the operations were led by the United Nations. The Soviet boycott, five months before hostilities erupted in Korea, represents remarkable foresight by Stalin to drive apart relations between the United States and China.

The Soviet boycott of the UN is often cited as a political and strategic error, since it was only in the absence of a Soviet veto that the UN was able to authorize action in the Korean War. Stalin knew better. Stalin was aware that a conflict on the Korean peninsula, despite assurances to the contrary from both Mao and Kim, would likely involve the United States.¹⁶⁰ Stalin's manipulation of both Mao and Kim would cause the hostilities in Korea to fall under the UN and not solely under a bilateral alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK). A UN force operating in Korea would reduce the risk of a formal declaration of war against North Korea, and thus allow Moscow to remain clear of combat support requirement in accordance with the Sino-Soviet Treaty. Stalin was able to expertly influence Mao into believing that the UN boycott was a sign of communist solidarity between the Soviet Union and China, all while laying the ground work for the Korean War.

¹⁵⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 82.

¹⁶⁰ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 72.

The victory of the CCP over the KMT and the formal establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, had brought Mao to a respectable position as the leader of China. Yet, the United Nations, motivated by the United States, failed to recognize the PRC as the legitimate government of China and the Nationalist government retained its seat on the Security Council.¹⁶¹ In fact, on October 2 the only nation to recognize the PRC immediately was the Soviet Union, which “became the first state to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing and sever ties with the Nationalist government.”¹⁶² Despite initial political recognition, Stalin and the Soviet Union failed to personally congratulate Mao and his compatriots, an act that Mao considered disrespectful and further added to the animosity between himself and Stalin.¹⁶³

Thus, it was in early January 1950, during Mao's visit to Moscow, that Stalin was forced to put his plan into action. Through his elaborate network of spies, Stalin was likely already aware of a shift in American foreign policy embedded in National Security Council 48/2 (NSC 48/2).¹⁶⁴ NSC 48/2 elaborates that “while Formosa [Taiwan] is strategically important to the United States, the strategic importance of Formosa does not justify overt military action...the United States should make every effort to strengthen the over-all U.S. position with respect to the Philippines, the Ryukyus, and Japan.”¹⁶⁵ Further confirming the hands off policy toward Taiwan, President Truman announced “on January 5 that the United States would no longer support the Nationalist government.”¹⁶⁶ The following day, both the United Kingdom and India officially recognized the PRC.¹⁶⁷

Could the United States be the next nation to recognize the PRC? Stalin was adamant to ensure the recognition of the PRC by the United States did not happen. On

¹⁶¹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 82.

¹⁶² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 76.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 81.

¹⁶⁵ “NSC 48/2: A Report to the National Security Council on United States Objectives, Policies and Courses of Action on Asia,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, (1949), CK2349353717. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.libproxy.nps.edu/servlet/DDRS?vrsn=1.0&slb=KE&locID=navalps&srchtp=asic&c=1&ste=4&txb=NSC+48%2F2&sortType=RevChron&docNum=CK2349353717>.

¹⁶⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 81.

¹⁶⁷ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 35.

January 7 Stalin dispatched Foreign Minister Vyshinsky to visit Mao's Moscow residence. After a preliminary discussion in which Vyshinsky agreed to sell aircraft fuel to China, the true purpose of the visit came to light. The Foreign Minister suggested that China should notify the United Nations that the continued occupation of China's seat on the Security Council by the Nationalist government was unacceptable. Mao should insist that the Security Council seat be transferred to the legitimate government of China: the PRC. Sweetening the deal, Vyshinsky indicated that the Soviet Union would support such a claim and if the UN refused, then "the Soviet Union will refuse to participate in the Security Council meetings."¹⁶⁸

This was welcome news to Mao; he now had Stalin's backing that the Security Council seat belonged to the PRC. Later that day, Mao dispatched a telegram to Zhou Enlai, who had yet to depart for Moscow, indicating that such a cable had been sent to the UN and other nations of the Security Council.¹⁶⁹ The Soviet Union, in an apparent sign of socialist support to Mao and the PRC, began walking out of all UN departments on January 8, 1950. Malik departed on January 13; the walkout was complete and the Soviet seat vacant. According to Richard Thornton in *Odd Man Out*, "Mao had fallen completely into Stalin's trap, but he [Mao] could be forgiven for not being able to see through Stalin's ploy. The possibility of war in Korea had not yet entered fully into his thinking."¹⁷⁰

It was imperative for Stalin to unite the West under the auspiciousness of the United Nations. If any military action were to develop on the Korean peninsula, the UN Security Council in its complete form would find itself in a stalemate. The Soviet Union would be expected to veto any reaction to military action against its communist brethren in North Korea. The only way a unified UN action could take place would be if the Soviet Union were not present to vote.¹⁷¹ The boycott also served an even greater

¹⁶⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 82.

¹⁶⁹ Mao Zedong, "Telegram, Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai and CCP CC," January 7, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112667>.

¹⁷⁰ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 83.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

importance, to ensure that the UN was the leading authority in a possible Korean War and not the United States. The wording in the Sino-Soviet Alliance that military support was contingent upon a “state of war” was Stalin’s gamble that given a possible UN action, no state of war would be declared during a Korean conflict.

After military operations began in Korea, Stalin’s decision to boycott the UN was further shown to not be a mistake. At any point Malik could have returned to the Security Council, his veto ability still intact. UN Security Resolutions 82 and 83, dated June 25 and June 27, respectively, established the “armed attack upon the Republic of Korea by forces from North Korea constitutes a breach of peace.”¹⁷² These resolutions indicate North Korea as the aggressors, and the Soviet Union did not attempt to show it in any other light. Shortly before the passing of UN Security Resolution 84, authorizing military operations in Korea, Andrei Gromyko discussed the boycott with Stalin. Gromyko advised that Malik would return to the UN to defeat resolutions that would hurt North Korea. Stalin reportedly responded, “In my opinion, the Soviet representative must not take part in the Security Council meeting.”¹⁷³

Stalin’s decision to boycott the Soviet seat on the UN Security Council in early 1950 served two distinct purposes. First, Stalin gained support from the Chinese leadership in a show of communist solidarity when most of the West failed to recognize the PRC as the legitimate authority in China. Second, with the Soviet representative absent, it was likely that any action in Korea would become a matter for the UN to solve. With the UN, and not the United States, in the lead a formal declaration of war was unlikely. Stalin could avoid direct Soviet involvement based on the wording of the Sino-Soviet alliance if necessary. Both of these actions brought China further into the Soviet sphere of influence, but this approach was just one of many used by Stalin to isolate Mao from the West.

¹⁷² “United Nations Resolution 83,” United Nations Security Council, United Nations, accessed August 15, 2014, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/83\(1950\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/83(1950)).

¹⁷³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 161.

C. AMERICAN CHANGE IN FOREIGN POLICY: ACHESON'S SPEECH

On January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a speech at the National Press Club summarizing the shift in American foreign policy. Acheson's speech reinforced President Truman's statement a week earlier and his own address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States was taking a hands-off approach toward Taiwan. Stalin was greatly concerned with the speech and his ability to continue to isolate China from the United States. Mao, on the other hand, saw the speech as an opportunity to finish off the remnants of the KMT held up on Taiwan without American military assistance. Acheson's speech forced Stalin into action.¹⁷⁴

Mao's December 1949 arrival in Moscow did not go unnoticed by American policymakers. Fearing an alliance between the two communist powers, the United States hoped to sway China away from Soviet support. Secretary Acheson's speech at the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, represents the change in American foreign policy as outlined both by President Truman's speech and NSC 48/2. The speech was designed to be addressed not to the American public or even Stalin, but to Mao.¹⁷⁵ Acheson's speech would have lasting ramifications on the security environment in East Asia that influenced both the foundation of the Sino-Soviet Alliance and the ground work for Kim Il-sung's justification for the Korean War.

In his speech Acheson focused on the rise of nationalism in Asia. The people of Asia were desperate to rid themselves from the poverty and misery they had endured over the last decade or more. Additionally, Asian people were against foreign domination. Acheson expressed, "whether that foreign domination takes the form of colonialism or whether it takes the form of imperialism, they are through with it."¹⁷⁶ Combining the desire to rid their nations of poverty and to govern themselves directly, Acheson noted the rise of nationalism was the key to independence in Asia. It was clear that his speech

¹⁷⁴ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 101.

¹⁷⁶ Dean Acheson, "Crisis in Asia: An Examination of U.S. Policy," *The Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 551 (1950): 112.

was directed at Asian leaders and that to best achieve independence they needed to focus on improving the quality of life for their people.

The speech then proceeded to address recent developments in China. Acheson acknowledged that the Nationalist government had fallen. His explanation as to why Chiang Kai-shek had failed to rally the Chinese people was likely intended for Mao's ears. Acheson explained that despite "overwhelming military power...[and] tremendous economic and military support and backing from the United States," Chiang had failed to achieve victory and was now held up on Taiwan.¹⁷⁷ It was the Chinese people, according to the Acheson, who became fed up with their own misery and decided to act. Acheson stated that "they [the Chinese people] withdrew their support from this government, and when that support was withdrawn, the whole military establishment disintegrated. Added to the grossest incompetence ever experienced by any military command was this total lack of support both in the armies and in the country."¹⁷⁸ Clearly stating that the communists did not create this condition, Acheson does acknowledge that CCP leaders took advantage of the situation.

It is clear that Acheson is extremely critical of Chiang's rule in China. If this policy on the Nationalists was not welcome news, then Acheson's discussions on limitations of American assistance would surely excite Mao and generate concern for Stalin. American assistance was only effective when combined with a government that was supported by the people and had the potential to succeed. Acheson argued that, "it [American assistance] cannot furnish determination, it cannot furnish the will, and it cannot furnish the loyalty of a people to its government."¹⁷⁹ While not specifically addressing China in this portion of his speech, Secretary Acheson's point is clear. Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists, as earlier outlined by Acheson, could not rely on the support of the Chinese people. Chiang's government had failed. Thus, American assistance would no longer be provided to the Nationalists. The United States had to all appearances withdrawn support of Taiwan.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 117.

Acheson, with the likely intent to draw Mao out of the Soviet sphere of influence, directly attacked Moscow's attitude toward China. Drawing on the sense of nationalism in China, Acheson noted that the Soviet Union had undertaken a new form of imperialism. In what was surprisingly close to the truth, Acheson stated that "the Soviet Union is detaching the northern provinces of China from China and is attaching them to the Soviet Union."¹⁸⁰ The provinces specifically addressed by Acheson were Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and Xinjiang. Hoping to gain Mao's attention, Acheson addressed this aggression by Stalin stating, "the fact that the Soviet Union is taking the four northern provinces of China is the single most significant, most important fact, in the relation of any foreign power with Asia."¹⁸¹ In one last attempt to show the willingness of American support to China, Acheson stated "that anyone who violates the integrity of China is the enemy of China and is acting contrary to our [America's] own interest."¹⁸²

Acheson's speech is most assuredly noteworthy for its approach to military security in the Pacific. Acheson stated that a "defensive perimeter runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus" and continues "from the Ryukyus to the Philippine Islands."¹⁸³ Acheson could not guarantee that nations within the defense perimeter would not be attacked. Furthermore, if such an attack were to occur, it would be incumbent upon that nation to defend itself and then petition for support through the United Nations.¹⁸⁴ Acheson's referral to the UN's solving security concerns in the Pacific had unknowingly fit directly into Stalin's plan to boycott the UN. Jacob Malik would walk out of the UN Security Council the very next day, January 13; however, it is unlikely the two events are related.¹⁸⁵ Acheson's defense perimeter would continue to affect strategic ambitions in Asia. Mao saw the omission of Taiwan from the defensive perimeter as another sign that the United States was unlikely to interfere in military

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 82.

operations on Taiwan. Kim Il-sung, in a similar fashion, viewed the exclusion of South Korea as a sign that the United States would likely write off the Korean peninsula.

Stalin needed to take advantage of Acheson's speech by downplaying the Soviet Union's alleged seizure of Chinese territory and forcing Mao to publicly respond to the speech. Stalin could not simply allow the speech to go unanswered as it portrayed him as "the national-imperialist that he was, rather than the so-called international communist he professed himself to be."¹⁸⁶ Under this premise, Stalin sent Molotov and Vyshinsky to visit Mao on January 17. During this meeting, the Soviet politicians indicated that Acheson's speech was a clear fabrication that deliberately attempted to slander the Soviet Union. They suggested that the first response to the speech come from the Chinese government; the Soviet Union would then issue a similar response.

This was unwelcome news to Mao. Washington's apparent abandonment of the Nationalist government was a welcome opportunity for Mao to complete his civil war victory. On the other hand, Mao did not want to anger Stalin as treaty negotiations were finally moving forward after weeks of inaction. Zhou Enlai was already on his way to Moscow to begin the negotiations. Mao's initial decision to ignore the speech was disregarded by the arrival of Molotov and Vyshinsky demanding a Chinese response to Acheson's speech.¹⁸⁷ The progress of the Sino-Soviet Alliance was a greater concern for Mao and he thus agreed to respond to Acheson's speech. It is clear that shortly before the treaty negotiations began, Mao and Stalin were still attempting to manipulate each other.

In a rare diplomatic victory, Mao was able to downplay the Chinese reaction to Secretary Acheson's speech. Despite Molotov's insistence to the contrary, Mao issued the declaration through the New China News Agency and not through the Foreign Ministry.¹⁸⁸ The Soviet reaction to the speech was released through the Foreign Ministry as would be expected. Thus, when Mao's release was through a lower level news agency, most of the negative feedback associated with the communist response to Acheson's

¹⁸⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 84.

¹⁸⁷ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 103.

¹⁸⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 85.

speech focused on the Soviet Union and China emerged relatively unscathed. The timing of Acheson's speech was ideal from the American view. By bringing up perceived Soviet control of both Manchuria and Xinjiang, Acheson was hoping to disrupt or break apart negotiations between the Soviet Union and China. The Secretary of State's attempt would fail to sway either the Soviets or Chinese and the Sino-Soviet Alliance would be signed almost a month after his speech. Furthermore, his defense perimeter would encourage both Mao and Kim Il-sung to discount potential American involvement in the Korean War.

Secretary of State Acheson's speech had lasting ramifications in the pre-Korean War months that directed Stalin, Mao, and Kim's strategic aims in East Asia. Stalin had to respond to the speech; the Soviet Union had been directly charged as an imperialist aggressor by seizing Chinese provinces. Acheson was remarkably accurate in identifying the Soviet leaders' goals, thus Stalin needed to force Mao to respond harshly to the speech and continue to direct Beijing away from Washington.¹⁸⁹ The memory of Acheson's words would play a large role in the Sino-Soviet Alliance negotiations later that month. Mao viewed Acheson's speech as an opportunity. It was clear that if Taiwan were attacked, the United States would not come to the defense of the Nationalist government. With Taiwan decidedly outside of the defensive perimeter, Mao could finally complete his revolution. Similarly, South Korea's exclusion from the defense perimeter gave Kim the impression that the United States would not defend the peninsula. Stalin was not so sure,¹⁹⁰ but for the first time since 1945, there was a doubt as to American response; a doubt Kim Il-sung was determined to exploit.

D. RETURN OF KOREAN TROOPS

Mao had recognized China's role in communist revolutionary movements in Asia. He hoped to be an example to other communist parties and demonstrate that their plight was not doomed to failure. Serving as the exemplar for revolutionary leaders like Korea's Kim Il-sung and Vietnam's Ho Chi Min, Mao welcomed the rise of communism in Asia.

¹⁸⁹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 101.

¹⁹⁰ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 87.

Stalin sensed that the revolutionary movement in Korea could force Mao into conflict with American policy. During Mao's visit to Moscow but prior to treaty negotiations, Stalin inquired of Mao his thoughts on Kim's desire for Korean unification. Mao expressed his approval of the plan and "also expressed the opinion that the United States wouldn't interfere in an internal matter which the Korean people would decide for themselves...We still should help Kim."¹⁹¹ Stalin had laid the ground work of support between the Chinese and Korean leaders. He would soon bring Korea's reunification to Mao's strategic view, arguably well before the Chairman had envisioned.

Korean and Chinese communists had a developed close ties during the early twentieth century. In the 1920s, the newly formed CCP was a political outlet for Korean communists and many joined the party, to include the future North Korean leader Kim Il-sung. Building upon a mutual anti-Japanese nationalism, the Korean and Chinese communists had developed a strong bond during the 1930s, through World War II, and into the Chinese civil war. Chen Jian estimates that "in the last stage of the war against Japan and during China's civil war, around 100,000 Korean residents in China joined Chinese Communist forces."¹⁹² Additionally, Korean citizens supported the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and by "the late 1940s the PLA's 156th, 164th, and 166th Divisions, three of the best divisions of the Fourth Field Army, were mainly composed of Korean-Chinese soldiers."¹⁹³

North Korean support for the CCP during the civil war represented a major element in the CCP's strategic aims. In September 1945, the CCP had decided to establish defensive operations in the south. Then, with North Korean support, the PLA would conduct offensive operations to eliminate the KMT in Northern China.¹⁹⁴ As military operations escalated in Manchuria during 1946, the CCP sought further assistance from North Korea. Chinese leadership requested to transport wounded PLA soldiers across the border for treatment, to maintain communications between PLA units

¹⁹¹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 130.

¹⁹² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 106.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 107.

with lines running through North Korea, and to purchase military supplies. North Korea agreed to aid in all matters. It is clear that “North Korea’s backing dramatically strengthened the CCP’s strategic position in China’s civil war. CCP leaders understood this and did not forget the ‘brotherly support’ they had received from North Korean Communists.”¹⁹⁵

Having watched this bond form between Chinese and Korean communists, Stalin saw an opportunity to exploit their relationship and create further distance between Beijing and Washington. It is in this light that Stalin brought Korea into Mao’s thoughts prior to the Sino-Soviet treaty negotiations. Thus, on January 8, 1950, Stalin urged Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Terenti Shtykov to discuss with Kim the return of Korean troops.¹⁹⁶ Shtykov dutifully obliged and by January 19, Kim had requested that the remaining Korean soldiers and their equipment be returned to Korea. The matter went before the CCP Central Committee and was approved on January 22. Jian claims in *China’s Road to the Korea War* that nearly “14,000 Korean nationality PLA soldiers, with their equipment, returned to Korea.”¹⁹⁷

Although both Mao and Zhou were absent from the Central Committee meeting, the former already in Moscow and the latter having just arrived for negotiations, it is unlikely that decision to return Korean troops was not approved by the Chairman. Regarding Kim’s request, “Mao and Zhou...were acutely aware of the implications of the troop transfer.”¹⁹⁸ It was unlikely that a troop transfer of that magnitude would go unnoticed by American intelligence networks. Combining that with the visit of both Mao and Zhou in the Soviet Union, it could easily appear that Stalin and Mao were cooperating and preparing for a conflict in Korea. The timing of Kim’s request for the transfer was not a coincidence. The Soviet leader knew it was far less likely that Mao could decline while visiting Moscow and “with Stalin looking on.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹⁹⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 86.

¹⁹⁷ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 88.

¹⁹⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 88.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

When Mao questioned Stalin on his intentions for North Korea, Stalin dismissed the charge of subterfuge by crediting the plan to Kim alone.²⁰⁰ Whether Mao accepted Stalin's explanation or is immaterial; it was now clear to the Chinese leader that Korea would play a strategic role in East Asia. Stalin asked Mao on his thought of American involvement in Korea. Richard Thornton outlines his response through an interview with Mao's interpreter Zhi Zhe's recollection of the conversation in *Odd Man Out*. Zhi claims that "Mao replied after some reflection that 'the Americans might not come in because this is Korea's internal affair, but the Korean comrades need to take America's intervention into account.'"²⁰¹ While this discussion did not give Kim the go ahead for military action in Korea, it sparked comprehension that Mao and Kim would compete for Soviet aid to achieve their strategic goals to take Taiwan and South Korea, respectively.

E. CONCLUSION

During the periods of Mao's isolation in Moscow, Stalin was secretly aimed to prevent any potential cooperation between China and the United States.²⁰² Stalin's strategic aims in Asia depended on Chinese dependency on the Soviet Union. As both sides prepared to negotiate the Sino-Soviet Alliance, Stalin took steps to ensure the treaty would further push China into the Soviet sphere of influence. Stalin's first major step was to convince Mao to protest the continued occupation of the Nationalists' government seat on the United Nations Security Council. Although both Mao and Kim suspected that potential military action on the Korean peninsula would not involve the United States, Stalin considered it unlikely that the Washington would maintain a hands-off approach. To ensure that a possible military action would occur under a UN banner, and not the United States, Stalin orchestrated the Soviet boycott of the UN.²⁰³ The boycott, along with Stalin's insistence that only a state of war could trigger the military support clause in the treaty, made Soviet support for military action in Korea unlikely. Stalin's policy was

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 90.

²⁰³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 82.

to bring about a war in Korea that would draw China further into the Soviet orbit; but he certainly did not intend to fight that war himself.

Secretary of Acheson's speech was the worst possible news for Stalin. In a single speech Acheson had acknowledged the defeat of the KMT, discussed Soviet intrusions into China, and left Taiwan out of America's hypothetical defense perimeter in the Far East.²⁰⁴ This provided Mao the assurance that military action against the remnants of Chiang's government would not involve American forces. Stalin thus moved to have Mao, alongside the Soviet Union, criticize the speech. While Mao was able to limit the negative response to Acheson's speech, he could not downplay the political and strategic implications of returning Korean troops to Korea.²⁰⁵ By urging Kim to request the return of Korean troops, Stalin had placed Mao in the uncomfortable position that both the Soviet Union and China were moving against South Korea.²⁰⁶ These concerns would register heavily on Mao's mind as treaty negotiations began. It was clear that he was being influenced by Stalin, but to what end Mao was uncertain. It would become clear too late for him to respond.

²⁰⁴ Acheson, "Crisis in Asia," 112.

²⁰⁵ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 85.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

V. KOREA ENTERS THE PICTURE

A. INTRODUCTION

Kim Il-sung's motives for reunification of North and South Korea remained resolute from the end of World War II to the commencement of the Korean War in June 1950. Kim realized that his goals of reunification would require support from another communist's patron, namely the Soviet Union or China. When Kim voiced his frustration that his bid for reunification remained heavy on his mind, he reached out to both Stalin and Mao. Stalin knew that he had to act and bring Kim into the Soviet sphere of influence. Stalin was already concerned that Mao was willing to open China to capitalist influence; he could not allow North Korea to do the same.²⁰⁷ Stalin's decision to bring Kim to Moscow and consent to military operations in Korea served the dual purpose of bringing North Korea squarely under Soviet influence and further isolating China.

Kim Il-sung had grown restless since Soviet leader Joseph Stalin denied his request to invade South Korea in September 1949.²⁰⁸ Kim looked on eagerly as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power and neared completion of the revolutionary movement in neighboring China. Kim likely believed that Korea would be next in line for the Asian communist movements; thus in early 1950, Kim renewed his requests for military reunification with Stalin.²⁰⁹ Stalin had seen the political world change over the past four months. The Soviet development of an atomic bomb and the continued negotiations of the Sino-Soviet Alliance were major developments that would lead to war in Korea. Stalin thus needed to continue controlling both Mao Zedong and Kim to maintain his security perimeter and avoid direct conflict with the United States. At the same time, the potential advantages of indirect conflict, in which the main burden, risk and onus would fall on allies or proxies, would gradually become more apparent.

²⁰⁷ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 92.

²⁰⁸ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo, "September 24, 1949 Politburo Decision to Confirm the Following Directive to the Soviet Ambassador in Korea."

²⁰⁹ Shtykov, "Meeting between Stalin and Kim Il Sung."

Stalin brought Kim to Moscow to ensure that Korea remained a Soviet satellite and not fall under the influence of the new People's Republic of China (PRC).²¹⁰ Furthermore, while Stalin would ultimately consent to Kim's reunification plan, he would put the approval authority squarely with Mao.²¹¹ Thus, Mao, and not Stalin, would be held responsible both politically and strategically if Kim's overly ambitious plan failed. With secret meetings between Stalin and Kim to discuss the war aims in Korea, Mao would learn about the possible war in Korea too late to take appropriate action.²¹² Mao, having been deliberately left in the dark, would fail to mobilize forces in a timely manner to take Taiwan before combat operations in Korea began.²¹³ This chapter will discuss how Kim Il-sung was able to appeal to Stalin and gain tacit consent of his reunification ambitions, explore why Mao was held in the dark regarding the Korea discussion, and finally identify how Stalin orchestrated the Korean War to prevent the completion of the revolutionary movement in China and force Mao further under Soviet influence.

B. MOTIVES OF A LEADER: KIM'S PLAN FOR KOREA

Kim Il-sung's telegram in September 1949 did not represent his first attempt to solicit Soviet support for unification of Korea. In a March 5, 1949, meeting between Joseph Stalin, Kim, and representatives from both governments, Stalin had promised economic and cultural aid to North Korea. Regarding military operations across the thirty-eighth parallel, Stalin was not yet prepared to support Kim's political and strategic objectives of reunification.²¹⁴ Based on the increased levels of tensions and localized conflicts across the border, Stalin did promise increased military aid along with railroad improvements and to help establish a basic aviation curriculum for the Korean People's Army (KPA).²¹⁵ Although Kim had not been granted permission to attack South Korea in

²¹⁰ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 102.

²¹¹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 144.

²¹² Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 102.

²¹³ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 95.

²¹⁴ Terenti Shtykov, "Meeting between Stalin and Kim Il Sung," March 5, 1949, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112127>.

²¹⁵ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 193.

March 1949, Soviet military hardware would flow into North Korea. Now Kim had to increase the manpower of the KPA; for this he looked to China.

To augment the KPA, Kim looked to recruit native Koreans currently living in Manchuria, a northeast province of China. In May, Kim sent the KPA's chief political officer, Kim Il, to talk with Mao Zedong to discuss increasing military manpower. The Chinese leaders were pleased to see that recent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) military victories over the Kuomintang (KMT) were fueling the revolutionary spirit in Korea. This new spirit could enhance Chinese political and strategic influence in the region. By generating closer ideological ties with Korea, the PRC would hope to weaken Soviet political involvement and thus China would emerge as the strategic power in East Asia. This new ideological motivation and potential power shift could also allow for China to complete their own revolutionary movement with the eradication of the KMT with the military takeover of Taiwan. Thus, with this encouraging news, the CCP approved manpower requests for the KPA.²¹⁶ Mao promised that two divisions from Manchuria, comprised of Sino-Koreans, could be returned to Korea when necessary. Mao also stated that ethnic Koreans officers were already undergoing military training and would be ready to return to the KPA by June. Finally, the CCP promised that "if a war breaks out between North and South Korea we are also ready to give everything that is in our power."²¹⁷ It is clear that throughout the spring and summer of 1949 that Kim was making significant strides to increase the potency of the KPA. With this military growth in mind, Kim renewed his request to unify Korea with Stalin.

According to William Stueck, "in mid-August, on the eve of Soviet ambassador Terenti Shtykov's departure for Moscow on vacation, North Korean leaders approached him with a new request to resolve Korea's division by force."²¹⁸ One likely reason that Kim renewed his efforts at this time was that since June 29, 1949, the American military

²¹⁶ Ibid., 194.

²¹⁷ Ivan Kovalev, "Soviet Report on the Results of Chinese-Korean Talks on Military Cooperation," May 18, 1949, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114898>.

²¹⁸ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 71.

had withdrawn troops from South Korea.²¹⁹ Kim understood that one of Stalin's greatest reservations about combat operations in Korea was the potential to come face to face with the Americans. With the American threat seemingly removed and their response either unlikely or unable to respond in a timely manner, Kim may have believed that Soviet approval was assured. Shtykov, however, was not convinced that the NKA could achieve victory quickly and remarked that "a drawn out civil war is disadvantageous for the North both militarily and politically."²²⁰

Stalin's decision to deny Kim's request for reunification in September was based largely on Shtykov's assessment of the situation in North Korea. Shtykov believed that since the NKA could not likely conduct a speedy victory, that the war would constitute a Soviet political setback. Combat operations in Korea, under the implied consent of the Soviet Union, fell into the American claims of agitation by Moscow. Furthermore, combat operations could be used as a premise for "increased American and international interference in Korean affairs."²²¹ Stalin had just seen the American forces leave South Korea, and he was not going to allow Kim's narrowly defined strategic goals to ruin the global possibilities that the Korean peninsula offered. Thus, during a September 24, 1949, Politburo meeting, Soviet leaders denied Kim's request to conduct military operations and continue strengthening defensive operations for a possible Republic of Korea (ROK) offensive.²²²

Stalin's denial to Kim signifies another strategic move by the Soviet leader to avoid conflict with the United States. Despite the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea, Stalin did not believe that an aggressive military campaign would go unanswered. Whether the response would be from the United Nations (UN) or the United States was unclear. Regardless, Stalin's strategic and political objectives continued to ensure that military engagements between the Soviet Union and the United States were

²¹⁹ Korean Institute of Military History, *The Korean War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 910.

²²⁰ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 196.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

²²² Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo, "September 24, 1949 Politburo Decision to Confirm the Following Directive to the Soviet Ambassador in Korea."

avoided. If it came to combat on the Korean peninsula China would have to be prepared to provide support to Kim. In *The War for Korea 1945–1950*, historian Allan Millet argues that “Stalin wanted the Chinese communists, not the Soviet Union, to take up the yoke of Korean patronage, or at least share it.”²²³ In September, the Chinese civil war continued. Kim’s request would have to wait until the completion of Mao’s civil war, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the February 1950 signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assurance before finally gaining Stalin’s favor.

C. TIME FOR ACTION: KIM GROWS RESTLESS

Shortly after Stalin’s September denial to Kim regarding military operations in Korea, the political and strategic environment in East Asia changed with the defeat of the KMT and the formal establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The arrival of Mao in the Soviet Union to discuss the renegotiation of the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty may have appeared as an opportunity for Kim to renew his request for approval from Stalin for military operations against South Korea. Kim now felt that, with China’s revolutionary movement nearing completion, that it was North Korea’s turn to advance the communist cause in East Asia. Thus, with this new political view in mind, Kim renewed his efforts to seek Soviet approval for his goal of reunification.²²⁴

In a January 19, 1950, telegram to Moscow, Ambassador Shtykov voiced his concerns that Kim was becoming increasingly concerned on the matter of reunification. Shtykov informed Soviet leadership that Kim, while addressing a combined audience of Korean and Chinese officials, that “Lately I do not sleep at night, thinking about how to resolve the question of the unification of the whole country.”²²⁵ Kim was concerned that if he did not act soon, he might lose the support of his insurgency movement already operating in South Korea. In both an open forum and in a private meeting with Shtykov,

²²³ Millet, *The War for Korea*, 197.

²²⁴ Terenti Shtykov, “Telegram Shtykov to Vyshinsky on a Luncheon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK,” January 19, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112135>.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Kim sought another audience with Stalin to discuss reunification. If Stalin was not willing to receive him, then Kim would look to gain the support of Mao. Kim apparently hinted to Shtykov that Mao had promised support once the Chinese civil war was complete, and that gaining Mao's approval would be relatively assured. Fearing that Kim was looking to move forward toward reunification without approval from Stalin, Shtykov concluded his telegram with a somber warning: "Kim Il-sung is constantly nurturing his idea about an attack."²²⁶

Stalin did not want to lose the control he currently maintained over Korea. He needed to ensure that both Mao and Kim reported to Moscow and not develop a mutual assistance relationship that excluded the Soviet Union. This information was surely unwelcome news to Stalin. At the same time that China was considering opening up political recognition to capitalist countries, it appeared that Kim was willing to move toward China if the Soviet Union was unwilling to back his military ambitions. With this potential shift in political and strategic influence in East Asia combined with his concerns over China's growing propensity to normalize relations with the United States, Stalin eased his previous reservations against Kim's plans.²²⁷ Stalin was still not yet ready to openly approve combat operations. In his January 30 response to Shtykov's telegram, however, Stalin voiced his understanding of Kim's current predicament. Concerned that the North Korean Army was still ill prepared for large-scale combat, Stalin agreed to discuss the matter with Kim in person. He directed Shtykov to "tell him [Kim] that I am ready to help him in this matter."²²⁸

Stalin's decision to receive Kim, and listen to his arguments on reunification, took place while Mao and the Chinese delegation were in Moscow. The pending Sino-Soviet Alliance did not ease the continued mistrust between Stalin and Mao. According to Thornton in *Odd Man Out*, "At the end of January, Stalin, behind Mao's back, secretly arranged for Kim Il-sung to come to Moscow to work out joint preparations for the

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 241.

²²⁸ Joseph Stalin, "Telegram from Stalin to Shtykov," January 30, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112136>.

war.”²²⁹ It was clear that Stalin’s decisions regarding Korea would remain a secret from the Chinese. Kim, elated at his good fortune, began preparations of expanding the KPA. Kim requested that Soviet credits for 1951 be used instead during 1950 for the purpose of “arms, ammunition and military-technical equipment for the Korean People’s Army.”²³⁰ Stalin not only agreed to the proposed early usage of the credits, but allowed North Korea to defray the costs by sending raw materials of gold, silver, and monazite concrete for use in Soviet nuclear development.²³¹

By March 20, assured that military preparations of the KPA were progressing, Stalin approved Kim’s request to meet him in Moscow. Once informed of his approval to travel to Moscow, Kim requested that the Korean delegation travel secretly. In his telegram to Stalin, Shtykov stated that “they want to make the trip to Moscow and the meeting with Comrade Stalin unofficially, in the manner as it was done in 1945.”²³² The request to have Kim travel in secret was welcome news to Stalin, “for it was his aim to keep Mao in the dark for as long as possible.”²³³ Kim departed for Moscow undoubtedly confident of the upcoming meeting with Stalin. Stalin’s previous denial had been based on concerns over the capabilities of the KPA and the risk of combat with the Americans.²³⁴ The recent influx of Soviet military aid and top-level advisors had the KPA growing in both size and competency. However, the concern over the possibility of American involvement in Korea, despite the June 1949 withdrawal, remained a concern for Stalin in their upcoming summit.

²²⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 101.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Terenti Shtykov, “Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky regarding meeting with Kim Il Sung,” March 21, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 21, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112044>.

²³³ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 102.

²³⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 134.

D. PLANNING THE WAR: KIM IN MOSCOW

Kim Il-sung and a small North Korean delegation departed Pyongyang on March 30, 1950, and would remain in Moscow until mid-May.²³⁵ Kim had yet to receive a definitive yes or no from Stalin on when military operations could actually commence. He informed Stalin that both North and South Korea were ready for unification; however, Kim was concerned about how the South Koreans would view him.²³⁶ Would he be seen as the revolutionary leader reuniting the Korean people as he envisioned, or as an aggressive warmongering dictator? Stalin attempted to calm Kim's doubt by stating that the Korean people "would follow the leading ram wherever he might go."²³⁷ Stalin's reassurance was echoed by Pak Hon-yong of the North Korean delegation and stated that "there was a 200,000-strong detachment of communists in South Korea...ready to rebel at the first signal from the North."²³⁸ His doubts subsided, and Kim was reinvigorated for the upcoming operations to reunite Korea.

It was now Kim's turn to calm Stalin's fears on the possible intervention of American forces in support of South Korea. Kim outlined four key points to assure Stalin of his ability to unify Korea without causing open conflict with Washington. First, the KPA would strike hard and fast, catching the South Koreans unprepared. Kim went so far as to say that "the war would be won in three days."²³⁹ Second, outlining Pak's earlier statement, the surprise attack would be supported by a massive uprising of communists in South Korea. Third, North Korean guerrilla forces were already in place in South Korea and had the ability to interfere with the South Korean Army from the rear echelons. Finally, Kim argued that based on the speed the KPA would be able to act, that even if American forces decided to react, they would not have the time to mobilize. Based on his

²³⁵ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 102.

²³⁶ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 143.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 103.

²³⁹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 144.

strategic judgment of South Korean and American responses, not Kim's optimistic assessment of the KPA's offensive capabilities, Stalin gave his consent to the plan.²⁴⁰

Despite his agreement to Kim's plan, Stalin was still uncertain as to the American response, the capabilities of the KPA, and the global ramifications if the Soviets were to be directly involved in combat operations in Korea. With these concerns in mind, Stalin told Kim that, "the Korean friends should not expect great assistance and support from the Soviet Union, because it has more important challenges to meet than the Korean problem."²⁴¹ Furthermore, regarding the Americans in particular, Stalin, according to Thornton, informed Kim that "if the United States participated in the war, the Soviet Union had no intention of fighting against the United States."²⁴² While it is clear that Stalin supported Kim's plan, he had no intention of wrapping himself up in the Korean peninsula. Instead Stalin turned Kim toward the only other revolutionary ally in the region who could render assistance if it became necessary.

Goncharov et al. argue in *Uncertain Partners* that Stalin "urged the Koreans to consult with Mao because he had 'a good understanding of Oriental matters.'"²⁴³ This was likely Stalin trying to play on Kim's sense of anti-Japanese nationalism and exploit the bond forged during the Chinese civil war with the Koreans. Furthermore, Stalin was refusing to openly approve combat operations. He had agreed to the concept and event consented to the plan, but ultimate approval would need to come from Mao.²⁴⁴ By making combat operation contingent upon Mao's approval Stalin had skillfully achieved two important political advantages. First, Stalin had raised China as the prominent revolutionary power in Asia and subsequently Mao would have increased levels of authority among Asian communists. By lifting China's standing in Asia, Stalin had made it practically impossible for Mao to deny Kim's mid-May desire for reunification. Second, Stalin had maneuvered Mao into a position such that, if the looming Korean

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 103.

²⁴³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 144.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

conflict failed, Soviet involvement would not be apparent.²⁴⁵ Just prior to Kim's departure from Moscow, Stalin again cautioned him stating, "If you should get kicked in the teeth, I shall not lift a finger. You have to ask Mao for all the help."²⁴⁶

Kim had no intention of asking for Mao's approval in the reunification process, but was not willing to openly defy Stalin. Instead, Kim intended to consult with Mao and not allow the Chinese leader the ability to refuse his desired military action.²⁴⁷ Mao, on the other hand, had grown concerned over the possibility of secret Soviet-Korean agreements ever since Kim had requested the return of Korean troops in January 1950. Prior to Kim's departure for Moscow, Mao had approved the Korean leader's initial request to visit Beijing. Mao wanted to discuss Kim's possible war plans. The North Korean Ambassador to China, Yi Chu-yon claimed that he would indeed relay the message to Kim who was "undergoing medical treatment."²⁴⁸ According to *Odd Man Out*, Kim's medical treatment was a cover story for all those not informed of his trip to meet with Stalin. In another attempt to gain information from the ambassador, Mao voiced his concerns over North Korean military preparations. When Yi was again aloof in answering, Mao grew more concerned that Kim may indeed be working plans behind his back with Stalin. Mao knew that if military operations erupted on the Korean peninsula, his plans to retake Taiwan would be jeopardized. This political environment set the stage for Mao and Kim's May 1950 meeting in Beijing.

In a similar manner by which he traveled to Moscow, Kim secretly departed for Beijing on May 13, 1950. Kim had every intention of stating that Stalin supported military action; no actual war plans or start dates would be discussed. Indeed, neither of those details had been arranged as Stalin was awaiting Mao's approval of Kim's unification intentions. The North Korean delegation sat down with Mao and Zhou Enlai late on May 13. During the meeting Kim informed Mao and Zhou that "it was Stalin's view...that 'the present situation has changed from the situation in the past and that North

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 145.

²⁴⁶ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 103.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 104.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

Korea can move toward actions,”²⁴⁹ This represented Mao’s worst fear, it seemed that Stalin was intent to support Kim’s reunification of Korea before supporting the retaking of Taiwan.

Following the meeting with Kim, Zhou visited the Soviet Ambassador Roshchin seeking clarification and an explanation in Stalin’s decision to support the North Koreans.²⁵⁰ Stalin was likely aware of Kim’s trip to China and prepared for the subsequent question from the Chinese leaders. His reply to Mao was sent less than six hour later. In the May 14 telegram, Stalin explains that “in light of the changed international situation, they agree with the proposal of the Koreans to move toward reunification.”²⁵¹ There is room for doubt in what Stalin meant by ‘changed international situation.’ Since Stalin’s previous September 1949 denial to support Kim’s reunification, several changes had occurred that could have led toward Stalin’s shift: successful testing of a Soviet atomic bomb, the Sino-Soviet Alliance, and changes in American foreign policy toward rearmament.²⁵² Stalin does not specify in his response to Mao the reason for the change, but again emphasized that any decision “must be made jointly by Chinese and Korean comrades.”²⁵³ This response continues Stalin’s plan to avoid direct Soviet involvement in Korea.

Mao’s decision to approve aid and assistance for a North Korean offensive was likely in an effort to continue an amicable relationship with the Soviet Union. The new Sino-Soviet Alliance granted air and naval assistance that Mao desperately needed for the assault on Taiwan. Thus, according to Stueck, “to deny Kim his wish would threaten Mao’s relationship with both the North Koreans and, more important, the Soviets.”²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 106.

²⁵⁰ Nikolai Roshchin, “Cable from Roshchin to Stalin, Relaying Mao’s Request for Clarification on North Korea Taking Action Against South Korea,” May 13, 1950, Digital Archive: International History Declassified, Wilson Center, accessed August 21, 2014, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115977>.

²⁵¹ Andrey Vyshinsky, “Cable from Vyshinsky to Mao Zedong, Relaying Stalin’s Stance on Permission for North Korea to attack South Korea.”

²⁵² Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 107.

²⁵³ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 75.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 76.

Therefore, Mao's reluctant approval to Kim was necessary to continue his hopes for a unified China. The specifics of Kim's military plans, however, remained a closely guarded secret, and during his visit to Beijing Kim "released no details of his military plan, let alone the date of the action."²⁵⁵ As a possible avenue for procuring Kim's war timeline, Mao even offered to provide as many as three Chinese armies along the Yalu River.²⁵⁶ Confident in his own war plan, Kim dismissed the offer to station the PLA along the North Korean border.

There is debate among historians as to how much Mao opposed Kim's plans for invasion. Chen Jian in *China's Road to the Korean War* argues that "Although Mao seemed to have some reservations; he never seriously challenged Kim's plans."²⁵⁷ Richard Thornton, citing an interview with Chinese Marshal Peng Dehuai, states that "he [Mao] vehemently disagreed with Kim's proposed action ... Mao raised the dire possibility of American intervention, 'but Kim did not take it seriously.'"²⁵⁸ The authors of *Uncertain Partners* express a similar concern over American involvement in Korea, but argue that Mao may have been compelled to support Kim regardless of his true opinion. They argue that since "the Chinese leader had secured a promise of Soviet support for the invasion of Taiwan. He [Mao] could not express his fears of American intervention in Korea without admitting to Stalin the likelihood of the same U.S. involvement in Taiwan, thereby jeopardizing that support."²⁵⁹ However, the balance between apprehension and opportunism may be struck, it is clear that Kim left China with Mao's support for military operation on the Korean peninsula.

The period from March to May 1950, would prove to be extremely beneficial to Kim Il-sung. The Soviet Union not only approved increases in military spending, but began to provide military equipment and, more importantly, Soviet military expert advisors. After revealing to Stalin that he was willing to work with China for the

²⁵⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 112

²⁵⁶ Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 39.

²⁵⁷ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 112.

²⁵⁸ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 107.

²⁵⁹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 146.

reunification of Korea, Kim was rewarded with a trip to Moscow. To his great relief, Stalin consented to his reunification plan under the condition that he first gained Mao's approval. Stalin was unwilling to get involved on the peninsula and if the North Koreans needed any support it would have to come from Mao. When he was notified by Kim of Stalin's strategic move, Mao realized that Stalin had decided to provide support on the reunification of Korea and deny support on Mao's move for Taiwan. Mao saw that his window for completing the Chinese revolution relied on his ability to retake Taiwan before Kim and Stalin could make their move in Korea, a timeline that was already knowingly shortened with the earlier transfer of Korean troops from China to North Korea. The race for military action had reached new levels of intensity.

E. MAO AND KIM: A RACE FOR COMBAT

Mao's strategic aims had remained unchanged since beginning his revolutionary movement. By late 1949 all that remained was the assault on Taiwan to completely eradicate the KMT and unite all of China. During his time in Moscow, Mao had begun upgrading the military units necessary for retaining an island. He organized paratroops units and ordered four divisions of the Third Field Army to begin training for amphibious landing operations.²⁶⁰ It was clear that despite the difficulties in the Sino-Soviet Alliance negotiations, Mao was determined to retain the initiative on retaking Taiwan.²⁶¹ Although Mao continued to believe that the United States would refuse to aid Chiang's government, the Nationalist government had turned Taiwan into a formidable military fortress. Additionally, the KMT naval and air forces were far superior to the PLA's.²⁶² In order for Mao to make his move on Taiwan he would need to compete with Korea for Soviet military support.

Following his meeting with Kim in May 1950, Mao accelerated his plan to retake Taiwan. Unfortunately, with Soviet support going to help the NKA, Mao was forced to build his forces from within China with little to no outside assistance. The buildup of the

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 148.

²⁶¹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 112.

²⁶² Ibid., 114.

Third Field Army across the Taiwan Strait proceeded too slowly. In June 1950 the Chinese “Central Military Commission postponed the attack on Taiwan itself until the summer of 1951.”²⁶³ With the retaking of Taiwan on hold, Mao directed that the PLA become more self-sufficient and increase agricultural work.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, in order to help alleviate the economic burden of the 5.4 million man army, in May 1950, the “CCP Central Committee decided to demobilize 1.4 million of the PLA force.”²⁶⁵

The demobilization of 1.4 million soldiers had, according to Chen, served three critical considerations for the CCP. First, the financial burden on the PLA was significant, thus with the defeat of the KMT on the mainland fewer troops would be necessary to keep order. Second, “a large portion of PLA soldiers were either former KMT prisoners or members of defecting KMT units.”²⁶⁶ CCP leadership wanted to thin out the possible disloyal elements of the PLA and improve the combat efficiency of the remaining force. Finally, the PLA needed to establish a navy and air force. By reducing large elements of the ground force, the capital saved could be used to develop and train forces that would be required to take Taiwan in 1951.²⁶⁷ According to the acting chief of the General Staff, Nie Rongzhen, the demobilization efforts began on June 20, 1950, five days before the Korean War broke out.²⁶⁸

It is unlikely that the Chinese Central Military Commission would have demobilized over a million members of the army had they known that combat operation were to commence on the Korean peninsula in June. Thus, according to Hao Yufan, “When the war broke out, the Chinese had only one army ... stationed along the Yalu river border area.”²⁶⁹ It is clear that Mao, while aware of Kim’s plan to unify Korea, had been left in the dark as to the actual North Korean military timeline. Indeed, both Kim

²⁶³ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 152.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, “China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 121 (1990), 98, <http://jstor.org/stable/654064>.

²⁶⁶ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 95.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Yufan and Zhihai, “China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War,” 99.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 100.

and Stalin had gone to great lengths to ensure that Mao was unaware of the NKA military plan of action despite Mao's inherent responsibility to assist North Korea if the plan were to fail.

Following Kim's return to Pyongyang with Mao's reluctant consent to support North Korea, the Soviet military exports to Korea increased dramatically.²⁷⁰ While the actual monetary value of military goods shipped to North Korea from the Soviet Union is unknown, it was clear that a dramatic rise in military imports occurred from 1949 to early 1950. Additionally, these goods were transported through naval transports to the port of Chongjin and immediately distributed to the KPA.²⁷¹ It appears that Stalin was not willing to send military equipment via rail through China to Korea in fear of the cargo being discovered through an unexpected stop in China. Stalin and Kim were not only intending to keep the military buildup secret to the United States, but also from Mao.

The South Korean invasion plan was also a closely kept secret in both Soviet and North Korean political and military circles. Stalin had sent a talented team of military advisors to assist the KPA in developing a military plan of action in April 1950. The original KPA plan of a defensive stand was scrapped with the arrival of Soviet Generals Vasiliev, Postnikov, and Marchenko. The Soviet advisors quickly drafted a plan focused on heavily offensive action and provided to North Korean political and military leadership. War planning was conducted in the utmost secrecy.²⁷² According to the North Korean chief of the Operations Bureau, General Yu Song-chol, "everyone who participated in this project was a Soviet-born Korean. The Yan'an faction individuals who had entered various military positions were excluded from this effort ... we had to maintain security."²⁷³ It was clear that Mao was being intentionally left in the dark. Thus, when the Korean War began on June 25, 1950, both Stalin and Kim had successfully duped the Chinese Chairman.

²⁷⁰ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 75.

²⁷¹ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 147.

²⁷² Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 110.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

F. CONCLUSION

Despite supporting the Korean leader's plan for reunification, Stalin continued to execute a policy of cautious isolation and continued to avoid the possibility of a conflict with the United States. Although Kim believed the United States would be unlikely to react to a North Korean advance, Stalin was not as confident.²⁷⁴ Thus, Stalin placed the go ahead for the operation on Mao's approval and gave himself plausible deniability if the operation went poorly.²⁷⁵ Mao, on the other hand, was left little room to maneuver against either Stalin or Kim. Seeking to be the face of Asian revolutionary movements, Mao looked to be a shining light to communist countries like North Korea. Thus, Mao was unable to provide anything but approval to Kim's war plans in Korea. However, Mao knew that he would have to race against Kim to gain Soviet aid to take the island of Taiwan before Kim could mount his move against South Korea. Unfortunately, Stalin continued to provide military aid to Kim and forced Mao to delay his military operations against Taiwan until 1951.²⁷⁶ Stalin expertly manipulated Mao and Kim to serve his political and strategic objectives. Stalin forced China, not the Soviet Union, to back the approval for a North Korean attack in June.

²⁷⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 144.

²⁷⁵ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 103.

²⁷⁶ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 95.

VI. CONCLUSION

Kim Il-sung's request for military unification of Korea in September 1949 forced Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to reassess his strategic views of East Asia. North Korea had been a satellite nation of the Soviet Union since the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in September 1948.²⁷⁷ Kim Il-sung had been hand-selected and installed as the leader of the communist regime in Pyongyang. Diplomatic and economic ties between the North Koreans and Soviets were strong.²⁷⁸ Less concerned over Korea itself, Stalin was ultimately concerned with Mao Zedong and the prospect of a rising China achieving normalized relations with the United States.

Mao's victory over the Chinese nationalists represented a unique opportunity for Stalin to further advance his goals for the Soviet Union. Stalin was concerned with Soviet security; a security he felt was more likely to be compromised from Europe than Asia. Thus, Stalin's focus on China allowed more flexibility than the strategic rigidity that had developed along the Soviet western border.²⁷⁹ Despite personal frictions that had developed between Mao and Stalin during the Chinese civil war, it became clear that if Stalin did not take steps to support the rising Chinese Communist Party (CCP), they were likely to look for political and economic support elsewhere. Stalin knew that the CCP's rise had not gone unnoticed by Washington, and Truman was already undertaking measures to lure China away from the Soviet sphere. Stalin needed to prioritize his desire to retain China in his sphere of influence while avoiding a conflict with the United States. Allowing Kim to begin military operations in September would have jeopardized both of Stalin's priorities. The Americans remained stationed in South Korea and any military action there risked direct conflict with Soviet forces. Based on this strategic approach to East Asia, Stalin denied Kim's request in 1949.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Korean Institute of Military History, *The Korean War*, 910.

²⁷⁸ Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 59.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁸⁰ Shen, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War," 46.

Stalin realized that Kim's nationalist motivation to unify Korea could not be suppressed indefinitely. It was imperative that Stalin develop a strategy for East Asia that mitigated the risk of conflict between the Soviet Union and the Americans while simultaneously isolating China from the West. This strategy would eventually lead toward the Korean War.

The Korean War was begun and conducted on terms that supported Stalin's strategic objectives in East Asia. The political environment had changed dramatically since his initial denial to Kim for military operation in September 1949. By May 1950, the Chinese Communist Party had come to power and represented a major presence in East Asia. Although Mao had openly decided to lean toward the Soviet Union for political, economic, and military support, he continued to seek relations with the United States. Mao's efforts undercut Stalin's strategic objectives, and put events into motion that would ultimately lead to the Korean War. Stalin's decision was designed to forestall the normalization of China with Western nations. Subsequently, Stalin forced the PRC further into the Soviet sphere of influence by forcing military aid to Korea and pitting Mao against the United States.

Nearly a year prior to Kim's request to begin a war of Korean unification, the Soviets had already begun their attempts to isolate China from the West. The CCP was new to the diplomatic game as they continued to make contact with American diplomats in China during their advance into Shenyang in November 1948. Thus CCP officials sought guidance from their Marxist/Leninist comrades who had significantly more diplomatic experience. From the very start of relations between the United States and Communist China, therefore, Stalin had the ability to influence outcomes that would have lasting ramifications. In order to create tensions between Washington and Beijing, Soviet advisors had suggested that American diplomats be isolated and their equipment seized.

In order to not be discouraged, the American Ambassador to China continued to work to establish diplomatic ties between the growing CCP and the United States. Yet, despite several rounds of talks between the American and CCP diplomats, neither side made any headway on establishing true diplomatic ties. After years of backing the Kuomintang (KMT), the United States was concerned that the CCP could not effectively

govern China and was unwilling to recognize the CCP as the legitimate authority. The continued house arrest and poor treatment of American diplomats in China further eroded the early relations between the United States and China. It was under this premise that Mao openly chose to align with the Soviet Union in his June 1949 speech stating that “we must lean to one side.”²⁸¹

Mao’s decision to lean to one side forced China deeper under Soviet influence. The decision to ally with Stalin did bring material benefits. In addition to securing Soviet diplomatic recognition, CCP diplomats led by Liu Shaoqi obtained support, in the form of military advisors and loans, that would bolster the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).²⁸² Stalin, however, continued to deny Mao critical military hardware required for an invasion of Taiwan. The risk of sparking a conflict with the United States remained too great and jeopardized Stalin’s security goals in East Asia. Liu’s visit served the secondary purpose of preparing the way for Mao’s visit to Moscow in late 1949.

The most significant political and strategic event in the period between Kim’s two requests for military unification of Korea was the establishment of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. The treaty was a direct response to the victory of the CCP over the KMT and the formation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. Although the treaty brought together the two largest communist nations, the negotiations were fraught with personal and diplomatic tensions between Stalin and Mao. Mao anticipated a fanfare arrival in Moscow, but instead he was swept off to the Kremlin and told that a new treaty would not be possible.²⁸³ Stalin had argued that the Yalta Agreement of 1945 prohibited a new treaty.²⁸⁴ Mao was then isolated in an apartment in Moscow. It was during this period that Mao, uncertain of his potential negotiations with the Soviet Union, began to put plans in motion to seek political support from other nations, to include the United States.

²⁸¹ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 57.

²⁸² Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 37.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸⁴ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 19.

In two separate telegrams in late December, Mao indicated to the CCP leadership that China should be willing to accept diplomatic relations from any state willing to sever ties with the KMT and dispatch representatives to China.²⁸⁵ Mao's telegrams made it clear that any country willing to meet these standards would be considered for recognition, to include capitalist countries. Whether Mao sent these telegrams for the true purpose of establishing diplomatic ties in the face of Soviet procrastination, or as a tactic to motivate Stalin back to the negotiating table, is unclear. The results, however, were immediate. Two days after the first telegram on December 19, 1949, Mao was given the seat of honor during Stalin's birthday gala. Following the second telegram, Stalin agreed that a new Sino-Soviet alliance would be possible.²⁸⁶ Mao's telegrams had caught Stalin's attention and threatened his strategy of retaining China under his influence, thus Stalin was forced to move toward a treaty. Stalin, however, would make several moves to drive a wedge between Washington and Beijing before the treaty would be signed in mid-February.

It is unclear exactly when Stalin decided that a military operation in Korea could serve his strategic goal. It seems that following Mao's December 1949 telegrams, however, Stalin decided to put measures in place so that, if such a conflict were to occur, it would serve the dual purpose of further isolating China from the West while avoiding direct military conflict for the Soviet Red Army. Stalin knew that any military action on the Korean peninsula would fall under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).²⁸⁷ A Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council could thus allow Moscow the opportunity to avoid an anticipated veto vote on hostilities against North Korea. Additionally, the timing of a Soviet boycott in early 1950 demonstrated political support to the PRC by protesting the continued KMT occupation of the Chinese seat at the UN.

While Stalin could manipulate his delegation at the UN, he was less able to predict the change in American foreign policy that came forth during Secretary of State Acheson's January 12, 1950, Press Club Speech. The speech was critical of the KMT's

²⁸⁵ Mao, "Telegram, Mao Zedong to Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai."

²⁸⁶ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 82.

²⁸⁷ Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 72.

rule and laid the groundwork for possible support to the PRC; provided that they demonstrate the ability to effectively govern their people.²⁸⁸ This change in tactic was exactly what Stalin feared. Stalin needed to ensure that any olive branch handed out by the United States was rejected by both the Soviet Union and PRC. Soviet leaders attempted to elicit a public response from Mao criticizing Acheson's claims. Mao, however, succeeded in downplaying his response to the Americans by releasing it not through the Foreign Ministry, as the Soviets demanded, but instead through the New China News Agency.²⁸⁹ This move may have left a small avenue for diplomatic relations between the United States and China, but it continued to erode the already tense personal relationship between Stalin and Mao. These tensions would continue to surface during the upcoming treaty negotiations.

It is no surprise that initial treaty negotiations were extremely tense between the two nations. With the arrival of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, however, the negotiations proceeded relatively smoothly. Stalin abandoned his earlier Yalta argument and instead offered to remove Soviet troops from China if requested.²⁹⁰ Stalin had been advised during the latter part of January that Kim continued to grow restless and saw a greater possibility of conflict in Korea²⁹¹; removing Red Army troops from China limited the possibility of Soviet forces becoming directly involved if such military operations occurred.

Chinese treaty negotiators believed they scored a diplomatic victory through wording in the treaty that guaranteed them the unqualified military support of the Soviet Union, a provision the Chinese interpreted as including nuclear weapons. The fact that Stalin did not protest the impossibility of supporting China with his then limited supply of nuclear weapons was likely lost in the perceived diplomatic victory. Stalin was willing to acquiesce in the treaty wording because he had a plan to greatly reduce the likelihood of rendering any assistance to China.

²⁸⁸ Acheson, "Crisis in Asia," 113.

²⁸⁹ Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, 85.

²⁹⁰ Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 112.

²⁹¹ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 241.

A significant difference between other existing Soviet treaties and the new Sino-Soviet Alliance was the description of the conditions required to invoke military support. Most Soviet treaties generally stated that a military engagement was all that would be necessary to bring Soviet assistance. The new Sino-Soviet treaty, at Stalin's insistence, was worded differently. Under its terms, in order for China to expect Soviet support, they had to be involved in a state of war.²⁹² The brilliance of Stalin's decision to boycott the UN comes to light with his insistence of this wording in the treaty. The UN, as an international institution, was unlikely to declare war. While the signing of the Sino-Soviet Alliance represented a major political statement, Stalin knew that its military effectiveness was more limited than it appeared. It is clear that even during the Sino-Soviet Alliance negotiations, Stalin was already preparing for a possible conflict in Korea.

Now that Stalin had laid the groundwork for a war in Korea he needed to bring Kim into the picture. Kim secretly visited Moscow in March 1950. During his visit, Kim assured Stalin that a victory would be swift and that concerns over American involvement were unwarranted.²⁹³ Even with the withdrawal of the American military the previous year, it is unlikely that Stalin would take Kim's combat assessment at face value. Stalin still looked to maintain Soviet security above all else, and would continue to avoid any situation in East Asia that risked direct confrontation between the Soviets and Americans. It is with this in mind that in April 1950, Stalin told Kim that if he needed any support in his attempt to take South Korea, he would have to ask Mao.²⁹⁴

The following month, when Kim visited Beijing, it became clear that Stalin had decided to back Kim's efforts to attack South Korea rather than support Mao's desire to take Taiwan. Mao, heavily influenced by his need for Soviet military aid, agreed to provide aid and assistance to Kim if his military operation were to run into unforeseen circumstances.²⁹⁵ Neither Kim nor Stalin shared any military plans with Mao. Mao,

²⁹² Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 117.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁹⁴ Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 36.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

therefore, looked to accelerate his timeline to take Taiwan. Without Soviet military support, however, Mao was forced to postpone his plans until 1951.²⁹⁶ Only a month later Kim would launch his failed attempt to take South Korea. Mao would be forced to redeploy troops and China would remain divided to this day.

²⁹⁶ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 95.

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