cover for the evacuation, and the interposition of the Seventh Fleet between Taiwan and the mainland; and on the afternoon of June 26 Acheson labored alone on the fundamental decisions committing American air and naval power to the Korean War, approved that evening at Blair House. Thus the decision to intervene was Acheson's decision, supported by the president but taken before United Nations, Pentagon, or congressional approval.

The military representatives at Blair House offered the only serious opposition to American intervention. General Omar Bradley supported Acheson's containment policy at the first Blair House meeting, remarking, "We must draw the line somewhere." But he questioned "the advisability" of introducing American ground troops in large numbers, as did Secretary of the Army Frank Pace and Defense Secretary Louis Johnson. At the second meeting on June 26, Generals Bradley and Lawton Collins again expressed the view that committing ground troops would strain American combat troop limits, unless a general mobilization was undertaken.

The United Nations merely ratified American decisions. In 1950 the General Assembly was a legislature more amenable to Truman's policies than the U.S. Congress was, so he got his war resolution out of the former. As an official Joint Chiefs of Staff study later put it, "Having resolved upon armed intervention for itself, the U.S. Government the next day sought the approval and the assistance of the United Nations." Truman called his intervention in Korea a "police action" so that he would not have to get a declaration of war; this inaugurated the pattern for the subsequent conflicts in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, of war by executive decision rather than through proper constitutional procedure.

Korea: Stalin's Expansionist Gamble

VLADISLOV ZUBOK AND CONSTANTINE PLESHAKOV

During their fateful meeting in Moscow in April 1950, [Soviet marshal Joseph] Stalin agreed with Kim [Il Sung] that, though he had opposed a "reunification" of Korea before, now it could be accomplished "in light of the changed international situation." Earlier, Stalin had feared that the Americans would intervene. What, then, caused him to reassess the situation?

The new alliance with Communist China must have been the biggest cause for reassessment. From Stalin's viewpoint, this treaty was a watershed: the Yalta-Potsdam agreement on the spheres of influence had been broken. The world was now open for a redivision of spheres of influence on the basis of new, ideologically drawn alliances. As a Leninist, Stalin knew that this redivision meant global war. He said to Mao [Zedong]: "If we make a decision to revise treaties, we must go all the way." This phrase, in a nutshell, contained the origins of the Korean War. As the world headed for its third global confrontation, the Korean peninsula acquired new strategic meaning. Stalin worried that should the United States rearm Japan in the

future, South Korea could become a dangerous beachhead for enemy forces. Therefore, it had to be captured before Japan could get back on its feet.

Several factors made the Soviet leader believe that the United States might not defend South Korea. On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union broke the American monopoly on atomic weapons. At about the same time, the last American troops withdrew from South Korea—a development that was closely watched from Moscow. Early in 1950 some key figures in U.S. governmental circles, particularly Secretary of State Dean Acheson, made statements that excluded South Korea from the American "defense perimeter" in the Pacific arena and even hinted that the regime of Syngman Rhee was expendable. On January 28 intelligence sources reported to Stalin that the South Korean government had "little hope of American assistance" and expected that "President Truman would leave Formosa as he had left China." The report quoted Syngman Rhee as saying that "America has shown from the very beginning that it does not intend to fight for the interests of South Korea." Stalin must have felt that the Truman leadership was in disarray, incapable of mobilizing domestically. In this view, the United States failed to make use of its atomic diplomacy, could not prevent the collapse of the Guomindang, its primary ally in Asia, and now it was withdrawing from the Asian mainland altogether, returning to its traditional role of defending the islands.

Another consideration had never been spoken. Had Stalin said no to North Korea, it would have looked as if again, as during the civil war in China, he were putting the brakes on the revolutionary process in the Far East. And Mao Zedong was autonomous and unpredictable. The Chinese could start supporting Kim without the sanction of Moscow, in the same way [Josip] Tito's Yugoslavia had supported the Albanians and the Greek guerrillas, ignoring Moscow's objections. Taking issue with the PRC just months after the much-trumpeted conclusion of the Sino-Soviet treaty in Moscow would be unacceptable and ruinous. Equally so would be the recognition of Mao's revolutionary supremacy in Asia. That could lead the Chinese comrades to think too much about their international role, and to revive their nationalist ambitions. Stalin knew that Korea, before it was occupied by Japan in the late nineteenth century, had been a traditional sphere of Chinese imperial influence.

When, in early April 1950, Stalin supported Kim's invasion plan, he believed that he was preventing both of these developments, while maintaining the appearance of parity with Mao. He told Kim that North Korea could "get down to action" only after their plans were cleared "with Comrade Mao Zedong personally." The North Korean offensive could be postponed if the Chinese leadership objected. Kim then returned to Pyongyang and made another trip, this time to Beijing. On May 13 Mao sent [Foreign Minister] Zhou Enlai to the Soviet ambassador N. V. Roshchin, asking urgently for the "personal clarifications of Comrade Filippov [a pseudonym of Stalin in correspondence among Communist leaders] on this question." Stalin's answer, a masterpiece of political astuteness, was that "the question should ultimately be decided by the Chinese and Korean comrades together, and in the event the Chinese comrades should disagree, the decision on the question should be postponed until a new discussion can take place." Never secure about communications

Stalin protected his credentials as the pontiff of world Communist revolution, responsive to the aspirations of the Korean people. At the same time he shared with Mao the burden of responsibility for the risky enterprise. Mao complained later that when he was in Moscow signing the Sino-Soviet treaty, Stalin "did not say a word about the conquest of South Korea." When Stalin invited Kim to Moscow, "nobody took pains to ask [Mao's] advice in advance."

Stalin's logic provides an explanation as to why he recalled the Soviet representative from the United Nations in the spring of 1950. Stalin boycotted the United Nations because it refused to recognize the PRC as a legitimate successor to the Chinese seat on the Security Council. In Stalin's view, the risk of the Soviets' absence was less than the strategic advantages of stressing the Sino-Soviet alliance and unmasking the United Nations as a "voting machine" obedient to America. It bears repeating that Stalin's reading of the United States' withdrawal from South Korea led him to believe that the Americans would not intervene in the Korean civil war.

Stalin and Mao were completely surprised when the Truman administration took advantage of the Soviet absence in the United Nations to obtain international approval for U.S. intervention in Korea. It was, ironically, the desire in the Kremlin to make a quick and victorious war, which the Western allies "so feared would happen in Europe," that "prompted the United States to respond with precisely the intervention in Korea that Moscow wanted above all to avoid." After the successful U.N. counterattack at Inchon in September 1950 and the resulting collapse of the North Korean army, American troops advanced to the Sino-Korean border.

Very soon the Kremlin leader concluded that the Inchon operation was a "strategic breakthrough by the U.N. forces fraught with fatal consequences." But he and his Soviet advisors had no control over the distant war. Kim's army got stuck south of the Korean peninsula, was cut off by enemy troops, and eventually disintegrated. Despite the gathering thunder in the Far East, Stalin took a train to his dacha at Sochi, on the Black Sea. As in June 1941, when developments went against his expectations, he took a time-out. What's more, the Generalissimo's physical condition necessitated a long rest. At Sochi, on October 1, after midnight, Stalin received an urgent cable from Pyongyang with a panicky letter from Kim Il Sung and the second-ranked man in the North Korean leadership, Pak Hong-yong. The letter informed him that the U.S.-led forces had taken Seoul and would probably capture North Korea, and that the North Korean army ceased to exist and thus would not be able to offer serious resistance. "The moment enemy troops cross the 38th parallel," Kim and Pak wrote, "we will desperately need immediate military assistance from the Soviet Union. If, for some reason, this help is not possible, then [would you] assist us in organizing international volunteer units in China and other people's democracies to provide military assistance in our struggle?"

This must have been a hard moment for Stalin: Kim turned out to be a bad military leader, but he was a loyal puppet who vowed to continue a protracted war to prevent, in the name of the strategic interests of the USSR and the whole Communist camp, the emergence of an American military springboard on the Korean peninsula. In the event of defeat, Stalin faced the ultimate responsibility for the deterioration of Sino-Soviet strategic positions and, as the Communist pontiff, the blame for losing

made his tactical decision in advance. It took him only a few minutes to dictate a telegram to Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, advising the Chinese to "move immediately at least five or six divisions to the 38th parallel" to shield Kim's regime from the advancing U.N. troops and enable him to mobilize a new army. Stalin mentioned almost elegiacally that he was "far from Moscow and somewhat cut off from the events in Korea." He wrote that the Chinese troops "could pose as volunteers [but], of course, with the Chinese command at the helm." He left it to the discretion of the leadership in Beijing to tell "the Korean comrades" about their decision on this question. In a matter of minutes, Stalin passed the buck to the Chinese, making them responsible for Kim's regime and the war.

Stalin's real "master plan" at that time was not a counterattack in Europe, as many in the West had thought, but postponement of a head-on collision with the West. He had taken precautions: his cables to Kim and Mao were all in military intelligence codes (considered to be "safe"), and he signed them with the Chinese alias Pheng Xi. He also had forbidden Soviet advisors to travel south of the 38th parallel, and Soviet pilots, flying over Korea, to speak Russian! He now refused to send Soviet troops back to North Korea, because that would lead to direct war with the Americans. Let the brave Chinese fight, with Soviet arms and Soviet air cover.

Some Chinese politicians, particularly the Communist boss of Manchuria, Gao Gang, had spoken in favor of Chinese intervention, to prevent the return of the United States (and, potentially, a remilitarized Japan) to the Asian mainland. There were, however, serious reservations in Beijing about starting another war barely a year after the end of the civil war. Mao's position was ambiguous, to say the least. He argued for intervention before his colleagues at home. At the same time, on October 2, he wrote back to Stalin that the PRC could not enter the war because several Chinese divisions would not be enough to stop the Americans. Always careful to appear Stalin's loyal ally, Mao also expressed his fear that the United States might declare war on China, which would mean a Soviet-American war as well. Feeling the urgency of the moment, Stalin stopped mincing words and, on October 5, dispatched to Mao the most remarkable cable in their whole correspondence, displaying the full force of his realpolitik logic.

The United States, Stalin wrote, "was not prepared at the present time for a big war," and Japan was still incapable of rendering any military assistance to the Americans. Therefore, if the United States faced the threat of such a war, they would "have to give in to China, backed by its Soviet ally, in [the settlement] of the Korean question." They would also be forced to leave Taiwan and renounce "a separate peace with Japanese reactionaries." Stalin warned that "without serious struggle and a new impressive display of its strength, China would not obtain all these concessions" from the Americans.

Stalin finished his seduction of the Chinese comrades with a stunning passage: "Of course I had to reckon with the fact that, despite its unpreparedness, the United States still may pull itself into a big war, [acting] out of prestige; consequently, China would be dragged into the war, and the USSR, which is bound to China by the pact of mutual assistance, would be dragged into the war as well. Should we fear this? In my opinion, we should not, since together we will be stronger than the United States and

war is inevitable, let it happen now, and not in a few years, when Japanese militarism will be restored as a U.S. ally, and when the United States and Japan will have a beach-head on the continent ready, in the form of Syngman Rhee's Korea."

Arguably, deep down Stalin hoped for just the opposite: that the Sino-Soviet treaty would be a sufficient deterrent and that the United States would hesitate to declare war on the PRC, knowing it would automatically bring in the Soviet Union. But he made a point of demonstrating to Mao that the Kremlin "father" of the Communist world had a sober vision of World War III and was not afraid of it. In this way, also, Stalin denied Mao his strongest argument against China's intervention.

Mao seemed to have surrendered to Stalin's logic: he agreed to send nine divisions to fight in Korea. Zhou Enlai flew by Soviet military plane to Sochi, allegedly to discuss with Stalin the terms under which the Soviets would supply armaments, ammunition, and particularly air cover for the Chinese "volunteers" in North Korea. The Stalin-Zhou meeting took place on October 9–10, and here again, as in the case of the Sino-Soviet treaty, the existing Chinese versions differ significantly from the newly available Soviet documents. According to Chinese sources, including Mao himself, at some point Stalin changed his mind: he would *not* supply military equipment and provide air cover. The Chinese leadership in Beijing was stunned by this act of perfidy but, *despite* it, decided to enter the war. According to Soviet records, however, Zhou told Stalin that the Politburo of the Chinese Communist party's Central Committee had decided not to send troops to Korea, restating the same old arguments. It is not clear what happened in Beijing: was Mao really facing strong opposition, or was Zhou deliberately playing the role of "bad messenger" assigned to him by Mao? One analyst of the Chinese evidence concludes that Mao and Zhou deliberately played "games" with Stalin. They were determined to send volunteers to Korea, but at the same time they were seeking the best possible deal from him. Yet another dramatic scenario is likely: the majority of Chinese leaders at that time strongly opposed the war and still hoped that Stalin was bluffing and would come to Kim's rescue once U.S. troops moved to the Soviet borders. Stalin, at least, interpreted the Chinese "game" in this light.

Stalin decided to call the Chinese bluff. The Soviet Union, he told Zhou, was not ready to fight a large-scale war in the Far East so soon after the Second World War. Besides, the Soviet–North Korean border was too narrow to allow massive troop transfers. If the U.S. actions were to jeopardize the fate of world socialism, however, the Soviet Union would be ready to take up the American challenge. Stalin began to lose his temper. The Chinese comrades should know, he said, that should they refuse to intervene, "socialism in Korea would collapse within a very short period of time." What Stalin in fact did was directly challenge the PRC's self-legitimacy from the high ground of the Soviet revolutionary-imperial paradigm. The USSR, he implied, should save itself for an ultimate battle with the forces of imperialism, whereas it is the duty of the PRC, as the major Soviet ally in Asia and the hegemon of the Asian revolutionary process, to fend off a regional imperialist offensive. In the light of the PRC's failure to perform its historic role, all Stalin could suggest was that the Soviet Union and China should work out specific plans to help the Korean comrades and their forces withdraw from North Korea and move to shelters in Manchuria and the

the Soviet Union would take care of all supplies of arms and equipment as soon as the PRC defined its actual needs. Despite all this, the Sino-Soviet talks ended without the establishment of any joint policy.

This episode showed Stalin displaying, under duress, the best of his realpolitik side. He was willing to swallow a serious regional defeat and even the loss of a "Socialist" regime on the Soviet borders rather than risk a military clash with U.N. forces. He saw to it that this policy would be shared by all his lieutenants by passing several Politiburo decisions. In [Nikita] Khrushchev's [future premier of the Soviet Union] presence he once said, "So what? If Kim Il Sung fails, we are not going to intervene with our troops. Let the Americans be our neighbors in the Far East." On October 12, Stalin surprised Kim, who expected Soviet military assistance, with a letter advising evacuation of the rest of Kim's forces to the Soviet and Chinese sanctuaries. Interestingly, Stalin referred to the "recommendations" of the "conference of the Chinese [and] Soviet leading comrades" (that is, to his talks with Zhou in Sochi). He didn't forget to blame Mao for what was solely his decision! At that moment, argues one Russian historian, the Korean War could have ended in a victory for the West.

The Chinese opposition to war crumbled under the weight of Stalin's stand, however. Within hours, on October 13, Mao informed the Kremlin leader that the CCP Politburo had decided to fight. Stalin, barely concealing his delight, sent another message to Kim, ordering him "to postpone temporarily" the evacuation, in expectation of "detailed reports from Mao Zedong about this matter." The next day Stalin announced to Kim that "after hesitation and a series of provisional decisions, the Chinese comrades at last made a final decision to render assistance to Korea with troops." He had quite a nerve to wish the Korean leader "luck." Less than a week later, on October 19, 1950, Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River. One week later they fought their first battle with U.S. troops. This seemed to many Western observers to be the prelude to a third world war.

Soviet documents dispel the myth that Stalin had allegedly been moved to the point of tears by how "good the Chinese comrades were." They reveal not a trace of revolutionary romanticism in the Soviet leader and show that, as in 1941–1945, he was even ready to act as a hard-nosed realist. The Chinese intervention, however, bore out Stalin's revolutionarism in a different way. Cynical as the Stalin-Mao bargaining may look today, its outcome was a great victory from the viewpoint of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm embraced by Stalin. The war helped wash away the ambiguity in Stalin-Mao relations: the Soviet leader accepted Mao without reservations, as long as the latter fought American power and depended on Soviet aid.

But the price of that new friendship and the continuation of the Korean War was high and tragic; it resulted in a huge setback for the USSR. The U.S. leadership adopted the view that the Sino-Soviet bloc was bent on global conquest. In turn, it was determined to destroy the aggressor and, if necessary, to embark on a large-scale campaign of mobilization and armament. The military budget of the United States quadrupled, and the arms race on the Western side did not slow down until the late 1980s.

boycotted a final peace treaty with Japan. Immediately, the United States signed a treaty of defense and alliance with Japan—Stalin's prophecy fulfilled. With Stalin's refusal to sign the Japanese peace treaty in San Francisco, Soviet territorial acquisitions did not acquire international recognition de jure. Therefore, the ground remained for controversy over four tiny islands in the Kuriles—Shikotan, Kunashiri, Iturup, and Habomai, which to this day poison relations between Moscow and Tokyo.

Another of Stalin's worst nightmares came true. The hostilities in the Far East gave a decisive impulse to the rearmament of West Germany, with the help of some of Hitler's former generals—an idea unthinkable not long before. With the Bundeswehr, a new West German army, NATO was on the way to becoming a full-fledged military force in Europe. And the U.S. government, through the CIA and other means, intensified covert operations to assist the anti-Communist underground in Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. In a word, the Americans began to wage the Cold War in earnest, with all available means short of outright attack on the USSR.

Did Stalin acknowledge these setbacks? He never gave any indication that he did. Several times after June 1951, when the frontline in Korea stabilized along the 38th parallel, the North Koreans, suffering mounting casualties from U.S. air strikes, begged Stalin for peace. Kim Il Sung told Stalin that the protracted war allowed "the enemy, who suffers almost no casualties, to cause continuous and terrible damage" to North Korea. Yet each time Stalin advised Kim to hold on, because the enemy, according to him, would capitulate first and soon. In fact, Stalin must have believed that the war of attrition would best serve the USSR's interests: it would tie down the United States in the Far East, and it would make both North Korea and the PRC even more dependent on Soviet economic and military power, which would guarantee the Kremlin a monolithic bloc and undisputed hegemony in the Communist universe. . . .

The Korean War proved to be the same for Stalin as the Crimean War had been for Czar Nicholas I a century earlier. The reign of Nicholas had started when Russia was an unquestionable great power, respected and envied in all European capitals. It ended in a shameful defeat for the czar's empire on its own territory, the Crimea, from the technologically superior coalition of Great Britain, France, and Turkey. Nicholas, however, refused to recognize defeat: only after the sudden death of the czar (suicide was suspected) did his successor end the war. Stalin had a similar decline from the Great Victory of 1945 to the deadlock on the Korean peninsula, virtually at the Soviets' doorstep.

The Lost Chance for Peace: Washington Rejected Chinese Communist Overtures

THOMAS J. CHRISTENSEN

In light of the documentary evidence from China and the United States, we can detect a causal link between two key American China policies of 1949–50—nonrecognition of Beijing and the blocking of the Taiwan Straits—and the disastrous escalation of the Korean War that occurred when China crossed the Yalu in the fall of 1950. To demonstrate this link, below I offer a new version of the "lost chance" in China thesis, arguing that while friendship between China and the United States was precluded by their ideological differences, peace between the two nations was not. A plausible argument can be made that Sino-American combat in Korea could have been avoided if the United States had recognized Beijing and had honored Truman's January pledge to stay out of the Chinese Civil War. . . .

The original lost-chance debate too often focused on Washington's ability to replace the Soviets as a friend and benefactor. In the early 1980s scholars began to address the lost-chance question more subtly, asking whether Sino-American relations could not have been somewhat better, even if they could not have been friendly. But despite these contributions, there has not been enough exploration of just how American policies, if different, might have reduced conflict between the two sides. This is not coincidental. The lack of documentary evidence on the Chinese side rendered speculation highly problematic. Using such evidence—including Mao's military and diplomatic manuscripts—below I analyze Mao's attitudes toward the United States in order to determine whether there was a lost chance for peace between the United States and China in 1949–50. I conclude that, while Mao viewed the United States as unquestionably hostile to the CCP in this period, he believed that American hostility might manifest itself in more or less threatening ways. American recognition of Beijing and abandonment of Chiang Kai-shek would not have provided a panacea for the many ills facing Sino-American relations. Still, those policies might have prevented the escalation of the Korean War in fall 1950.

In January 1949 Mao advised the Central Committee of its responsibilities in bringing the civil war to a successful conclusion. Mao's assessment of the American threat was a central element in his presentation. His view of America's future policies toward China was complex. On the level of intentionality, Mao saw the United States as unalterably hostile to his revolution. He saw no chance for friendship with Washington. On the other hand, he viewed the United States as a somewhat rational actor that eventually would recognize the futility of armed intervention in China. He went so far as to speculate that the United States might end direct military assistance to the KMT [Chiang's non-Communist Kuomintang] and then recognize the CCP regime. Still, Mao believed that even if the United States withdrew entirely from the civil war and recognized the Communists, Washington would still support covertly all available domestic opponents to his regime.

Despite intermittent notes of caution, Mao's talk was generally quite optimistic. He believed that American leaders, relative newcomers to "imperialism," were becoming wiser, recognizing the futility of significant assistance to Chiang Kai-shek. Therefore, in the future, Mao believed the United States would likely limit its activities to subversion. Mao said:

> In our strategic planning, we have always calculated in the possibility that the United States would directly send troops, occupying several coastal cities and engaging in warfare with us. We still must not dismiss this type of possibility. . . . *But, as the Chinese people's revolutionary strength increases and becomes more resolute, the possibility that the United States will carry out a direct military intervention also decreases*