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# The birth of the People's Republic of China and the road to the Korean War

NIU JUN

The international order in East Asia changed dramatically following the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945; the two most consequential events of this period were the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, and, one year later, the PRC's entry into a three-year military contest against the United States in the Korean War, 1950–53. These developments confirmed the spread of the Cold War to East Asia and determined the long-term pattern of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the region. For China, the decision to ally with the USSR and enter the Korean War meant that there was no alternative but to man Asia's Cold War frontier against US encroachment. All developments accompanying the birth of the PRC and its choice of foreign policies – especially the decision to enter the Korean War – were deeply rooted in China's domestic politics, and it can be safely concluded that the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made coherent choices when confronted with international crises. Yet the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union rapidly grew into the most significant characteristic of the postwar international system, and greatly influenced the future of China. From 1945, it was the interaction between four actors – the United States, the USSR, the Guomindang (GMD), and the CCP – that constituted the fundamental interface between Chinese domestic politics and the international system. It was also this dynamic that pushed China into deeper and deeper involvement in the Cold War.

## A fragile peace

Toward the end of the Sino-Japanese War, the political situation in China was chaotic. GMD–CCP relations were enmeshed with Sino-American and Sino-Soviet relations and with the conflicts between the United States and the USSR over their China policies. Two important international agreements influenced

China's internal political situation. One was the secret Yalta agreement of February 1945 reached by the American and Soviet leaderships; the other was the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship signed by the Soviet Union and the GMD-controlled Republic of China in August 1945. A history of diplomatic maneuverings among the United States, the USSR, and the GMD government lay behind these two agreements, and through them the United States and the USSR attempted to coordinate their China policies. Meanwhile, both superpowers attempted to make acceptable to each other their arrangements for China's political development after World War II.

In 1941, once war had broken out in the Pacific, US leaders had been temporarily convinced that, were China to emerge as a pro-American power in East Asia, this would not only help to defeat Japan, but also serve as a shield to contain the USSR and limit the revolutionary trend in the region.[1] The problem was that the United States conflated the success of its China policies with the maintenance of Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek's) leadership, and Jiang was facing a series of grave domestic crises by the end of the war. The press in the Allied countries also frequently criticized the Nationalist government's financial corruption and military shortcomings. Further complicating the matter for the United States, since the summer of 1943, were the struggles between the GMD and the CCP, wherein new military conflicts loomed.

The United States did not want a large-scale Chinese civil war for a number of reasons. Washington believed that Chinese military forces should concentrate on fighting the war against Japan, not least since the Soviets had yet to be persuaded to commit troops in that war. Facing a worsening of the political and military situation in China, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration searched for ways to maintain Jiang Jieshi's position and, by doing so, to avoid a civil war. This objective later led to direct and active American intervention in the GMD–CCP conflicts through the missions of Generals Patrick Hurley and George C. Marshall to broker peace in China.

Iosif Stalin seems to have anticipated several potential problems once the USSR entered the war against Japan. In his estimation, what mattered most for Soviet policy in postwar East Asia was balancing Sino-Soviet and Soviet–US

1 "Outline of Long-Range Objectives and Policies of the United States with Respect to China," January 14, 1945, "Unity of Anglo-American-Soviet Policy toward China," January 14, 1945, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1955), 352–54, 356–58 (hereafter *FRUS*, with year and volume number); Summer Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York: Harper, 1951), 186.

relations with a mind to achieving and protecting Soviet strategic interests in the Middle Kingdom, and he was much less interested than Washington in resolving China's internal problems. Stalin thought that the United States and Britain would not allow the CCP to gain absolute political power, and thus felt that the USSR could not support any radical ambitions held by the Chinese Communists. Moreover, in Stalin's mind, it was uncertain whether the CCP conformed to Soviet ideological standards, and the GMD seemed plainly to be in a more powerful position than the Communists. By all accounts, for Stalin, relations with the CCP were a lower priority than those with the United States and with Jiang Jieshi's regime. From the summer of 1944 to some time after the war's conclusion, Soviet leaders told almost every American representative visiting Moscow that they would support US policies in China and US efforts to mediate the GMD–CCP conflict. They also told the Nationalist government that "there could only be one government in China, led by the GMD."[2]

Up to the summer of 1945, the United States and the USSR attempted to coordinate their China policies based on the assumption of "peace under Jiang Jieshi," which they both believed to be a reasonable outcome. This premise set two objectives. The first was to support Jiang's political standing in postwar China, and specifically the Nationalist government's legitimacy and Jiang's leadership position within that government. The second was to avoid a civil war between the GMD and the CCP.

Both the United States and the USSR enjoyed considerable influence in China, but the GMD and the CCP still played the key roles in the country's political development. After Japan announced its surrender on August 14, 1945, the Nationalist government immediately faced the major problems of restoring its rule in China, recovering control of most of east and north China – including those areas occupied by the CCP forces – and taking back Manchuria, which Soviet forces had occupied after Stalin declared war on Japan in the last days of the Japanese empire. The main difficulty for Jiang was the speed with which he had to carry out these operations: the GMD could not amass enough forces in the time available for all these tasks.

2 Herbert Feis, *The China Tangle: The American Effort in China from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 140–41; "The Meeting between General Hurley and Molotov," "Meeting between Hurley and Marshall Stalin," April 15, 1945, Shijie zhishi chubanshe (ed. and comp.), *Zhongmei guanxi ziliao huibian* [Collection of Documents on Sino-American Relations], 3 vols. (Beijing: Shijie zhishi, 1957), vol. I, 139–41, 159–61.

Jiang Jieshi needed – and received – American support. Yet he must also have known that the United States did not want him to use force against the CCP, and that the USSR would never accept the extermination of the Communists by the GMD. Jiang had at least to demonstrate his willingness to attempt a political settlement. On the day of the signing of the Sino-Soviet treaty in August 1945, Jiang Jieshi telegrammed the CCP chairman Mao Zedong and invited him to "please come to the war-time capital" for a GMD–CCP summit.

After the US diplomatic mission under George C. Marshall arrived in China in late December, Jiang agreed to accept US mediation and to resolve GMD–CCP conflicts through renewed political talks. His reasons for these decisions were essentially no different from those behind his earlier invitation extended to Mao to come to Chongqing. After the military confrontations in north and northeast China in mid-October, Jiang again determined that the GMD forces lacked the resources necessary to eliminate the CCP militarily. The next steps that Jiang took showed that he was temporarily retreating from using force. He limited military activities, resumed GMD–CCP negotiations, and reduced Sino-Soviet tension.

Since the outbreak of war against Japan in the summer of 1937, the CCP's approach to relations with the GMD had been characterized by efforts to avoid a large-scale civil war and to use political means to push the GMD toward a settlement. So long as the USSR remained allied with the United States and Britain, CCP leaders believed that they could not carry out a radical revolution, but Mao also felt reassured that the GMD would not try to eradicate the CCP by force.[3] This situation benefited the CCP, as it occupied a weaker position at the time.

In light of the Nationalist government's military defeats against Japan and the failed negotiations mediated by Patrick Hurley in late 1944 and early 1945, CCP leaders had for a while contemplated adopting more radical policies. However, Mao's speech at an internal meeting of the Seventh CCP Congress in the spring of 1945 revealed that CCP leaders had many alternative visions regarding the specific form of a so-called coalition government. One of them was very close to the basic US plan: that is, establishing a government headed by Jiang with the participation of other parties, including the CCP.[4]

3 Mao Zedong's telegram to Liu Shaoqi, July 9, 1942, in Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi (comp.), *Mao Zedong wenji* [Collected Works of Mao Zedong], 8 vols. (Beijing: Renmin, 1993), vol. II, 434.

4 Mao Zedong, "Explanations of the Coalition Government," March 31, 1945, *Mao Zedong zai qida de baogao he jianghua ji* [Collection of Mao Zedong's Reports and Speeches at the Seventh CCP Congress] (hereafter *Mao Zedong zai qida*), (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1995), 102–03.

CCP leaders had been convinced before the end of the war that the USSR would not assist them as it had the East European countries.[5] They paid more attention to the possibility of armed US intervention than to Soviet policies. Mao certainly felt disgruntled by the Soviet leaders' demand that he go to Chongqing for negotiations, but what caused his gravest concerns was more likely Stalin's pessimistic prediction of China's impending civil war, that "the Chinese nation faced the risk of destruction."[6] Not only was Stalin warning the CCP Central Committee, but the Soviet embassy in China and the Soviet army in Manchuria all believed that it was very likely the United States would intervene militarily in China in case of a civil war.

Influenced by Soviet thinking, Mao believed at the time that "the United States would necessarily intervene" if the CCP were to occupy big cities such as Nanjing and Shanghai. Clearly, this belief was one of the main reasons why the CCP Central Committee decided to resume negotiations with the GMD; this view also determined the party's basic position that it should participate in a government headed by Jiang Jieshi. Mao described the arrangement as "dictatorship plus some democracy."[7]

Soon after the Chongqing negotiations began and even after the signing of an agreement on October 10, the GMD and the CCP began major military operations in north and northeast China. Yet, the CCP Central Committee still maintained that the fighting was temporary, and that the following six months would be a transitional period from civil war to peace.[8] After President Harry S. Truman summed up his policy toward China on December 15, and after the Council of Foreign Ministers Moscow Conference and the start of the Marshall mission, the CCP decided to resume negotiations with the GMD. The Communist leadership thought that the political agreement brokered by Marshall was acceptable, and even that the plan to integrate the two armies

5 Mao Zedong, "Conclusions at the Seventh CCP Congress," May 31, 1945, *Mao Zedong zai qida*, 197; Wang Ruofei, "Records of Comrade Wang Ruofei's Reports," August 3, 1945, 6442/1.4, Archive of the Department of CCP History, People's University, Beijing.

6 *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong], 5 vols. (Beijing: Renmin, 1997), vol. V, 286.

7 Hu Qiaomu huiyilu bianxie zu (ed. and comp.), *Hu Qiaomu huiyi Mao Zedong* [Hu Qiaomu's Recollections of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin, 1994), 396–98.

8 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions regarding the Situation and Tasks of the Transitional Period," October 20, 1945, in Zhongyang dang'anguan (ed. and comp.), *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji* [Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee] (hereafter *ZZWXJ*), 18 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang dangxiao, 1989–92), vol. XV, 371–72.

was quite commendable. They believed that "a new period of peace and democracy [had] begun."[9]

Judging from the outcome of its participation in the negotiations, the CCP's political plan reflected the prognostications of the Seventh Congress. The CCP leaders were notably consistent in their thinking regarding the issues at hand. For some time after the Sino-Japanese War, they were still convinced that "the central problem in the world now was the struggle between the United States and the USSR, which, reflected in China, was the struggle between Jiang Jieshi and the CCP."[10] Since both the United States and the USSR deemed the Nationalist government to be legitimate, and since they demanded the peaceful resolution of GMD–CCP conflicts, as the weaker side, the CCP had to compromise.

The GMD and the CCP conducted a series of negotiations from the end of the Sino-Japanese War to June 1946. Regardless of their reasoning, they at least tried to look for political solutions and to achieve their goals through discussion rather than civil war. This peace held as long as both Chinese parties believed that some form of US–Soviet cooperation would survive. In these circumstances, neither the GMD nor the CCP had the capability to eliminate the other by force, each therefore had to accept a political solution mandated by the two superpowers.

## The Cold War and the Civil War

After ten months of off-and-on negotiations between the GMD and the CCP, a full-scale civil war finally broke out in June 1946. The timing of the conflict was very much determined by the Cold War. In fact, the tenor of GMD–CCP negotiations had been fluctuating directly in tune with that of US–USSR relations. As the Cold War set in – in part because of the suspicions the two sides had about each other's East Asian policies – both the GMD and the CCP saw opportunities to take advantage of the contradictions and tensions that became increasingly evident as the superpowers pursued their overall goals.

After the Sino-Japanese War, the United States began sending troops to China – 110,000 at their peak. Most of these troops were stationed in the north

9 Liu Shaoqi, "Report on the Current Situation," January 31, 1946, in Department of CCP History, People's University of China (ed. and comp.), *Zhonggong dangshi cankao ziliao: jiefang zhanzheng shiqi I* [Reference Materials of CCP History: Liberation War Period I], 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue, 1981), vol. VII, 120.

10 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions," November 28, 1945, in *ZZWXJ*, vol. XV, 455–56.

of the country. Even if unintended, the presence of the American forces, who assisted the Nationalist government with logistics and airlifting GMD troops to Manchuria, resulted in an intensified atmosphere of confrontation. In addition, American units had frequent skirmishes with CCP forces in northern China. It seemed clear to the CCP leadership that the US forces would risk getting involved in a Chinese civil war in order to help Jiang Jieshi recover his control. General Marshall typified Washington's concerns. He was convinced that if China were to be riven by civil war, and if the Soviets profited by controlling Manchuria, then the United States would have failed to achieve its "major goal of entering the Pacific war." If the United States wanted to save Jiang Jieshi, on the other hand, it would have to take over China's government and "shoulder endless duties."[11] Ultimately, the Truman administration chose to mediate GMD–CCP conflicts as Roosevelt's administration had before it.

Large numbers of Soviet troops had entered Manchuria once the USSR declared war against Japan in August, creating tension with US troops that had come into northern China. The USSR began withdrawing its forces from Manchuria that October, but the following month, when Jiang Jieshi shut down his northeast headquarters in Manchuria and ordered attacks on CCP forces in and around Shanhaiguan, Soviet troops quickly returned south and seized the major cities and traffic routes. The Red Army occupied the main ports in Manchuria and forbade US ships transporting GMD forces from docking there, but the Soviets also moved quickly to ease tensions with the GMD government in other areas and asked that economic issues in Manchuria be resolved through negotiation. The Soviets also limited their aid to CCP forces (while denying in public that any aid was given at all) and reiterated their position that GMD–CCP conflicts should be solved through negotiations.[12] At the Moscow Conference, Soviet foreign minister Viacheslav Molotov again supported democratic unification "under the Nationalist government," and promised that the Soviet army would withdraw as planned.[13]

11 "Memorandum of Conversation, by General Marshall," December 11, 1945, *FRUS, 1945: China*, vol. VII, 767–69.

12 "Memorandum of Conversation between Comrade Stalin and Jiang Jieshi's Personal Representative Jiang Jingguo," December 30, 1945, in A. M. Ledovskii, trans. Chen Chunhua and Liu Cunkuan, *Si Dalin yu zhongguo* [Stalin and China] (Beijing: Xinhua, 2001), 24–25.

13 History Department of Fudan University (ed. and comp.), *Zhongguo jindai duiwai guanxishi ziliao xuanji* [A Selection of Documents on Modern China's Foreign Relations] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1977), 322–23.

The United States and the Soviet Union seemed to move toward a new compromise at the end of 1945. However, US strategic worries about Soviet troops in Manchuria remained, as did Stalin's anger over having been shut out of any role in Japan. The Truman administration had followed Soviet moves in Manchuria very closely, and Marshall considered forcing the Soviets out of Manchuria to be his primary task. But the Truman administration was not ready to pull the chestnuts from the fire for Jiang in Chinese domestic politics. Marshall asked Jiang to make political concessions, and urged the Nationalist government to accept the CCP's request for a total ceasefire in northern China. The main objective of Marshall's efforts was to permit Jiang to dispatch more troops to take over Manchuria.

Jiang Jieshi adopted the tactic of using political concessions to obtain Marshall's support for the destruction of the CCP's military potential. He also wanted to exploit the Americans' suspicion of the Soviets to change US policy in the longer term. Jiang did not yet intend to commit his best troops to Manchuria. By improving relations with the Soviets, he hoped for their assistance in taking over the region. During the Sino-Soviet negotiations over Manchurian economic questions, the Nationalist government tried to win from the Soviets the promise of a trouble-free occupation of Manchuria in exchange for certain concessions. During his visit to Moscow in December 1945, Jiang Jingguo, Jiang Jieshi's Soviet-educated son, further promised the Soviets that Manchuria would never become an anti-Soviet base and that no Chinese troops would be stationed on the Sino-Soviet border.[14] With such efforts from both sides, Sino-Soviet relations showed signs of improvement. The Soviets concentrated on these negotiations. They did not intervene in Marshall's mediation mission, but they did try to persuade the CCP to propose a ceasefire.

Sino-Soviet relations experienced a reversal after February 1946. With the GMD–CCP negotiations making some progress, the situation in north China stabilized. Marshall then wanted to apply more pressure on the USSR over Manchuria. He encouraged the Nationalist government not to make further concessions to the Soviets, and also recommended in a report to President Truman that more measures should be taken to force the Soviet troops out of Manchuria.[15] On February 9, the United States told the USSR and China that it opposed handling Japanese property in Manchuria exclusively

14 "Memorandum of Conversation between Comrade Stalin and Jiang Jieshi's Personal Representative Jiang Jingguo," 15–23.

15 "General Marshall to President Truman," February 9, 1946, *FRUS, 1946: China*, vol. IX, 426–29.

through negotiations between China and the USSR. Soon afterward the terms of the Yalta agreement were made public and the American and British press began to criticize Soviet behavior in Manchuria.

There is no doubt that American support encouraged Jiang Jieshi to change his policy of cooperation with the USSR. In February, anti-Soviet demonstrations broke out in Chongqing and other cities, instigated and assisted by the GMD, but reflecting anti-Soviet sentiment among parts of the public. These demonstrations added to the pressure on the government. Since he now believed he had US backing for sending GMD forces into Manchuria after the ceasefire, Jiang no longer wanted to yield to the Soviets. On March 5, the Nationalist government rejected Soviet demands on Manchurian economic issues.

The deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations coincided with increasing tension between the GMD and the CCP in Manchuria. Not only did Jiang notice the changes in US–Soviet relations, he also believed that Marshall was increasingly leaning toward the GMD in intra-Chinese mediation efforts. He thus took an increasingly hardline stance on all matters relating to Manchuria. At the critical moment of the battle of Siping in April 1946, Jiang rejected Marshall's suggestion for a ceasefire. Even so, Marshall agreed to transport more troops to Manchuria for the GMD. Having made up his mind to completely destroy the CCP in Manchuria, Jiang took advantage of US efforts to constrain the USSR. Marshall at first acquiesced and then gave reluctant support to Jiang's strategy. Gradually, the strategic visions of the United States and the GMD converged in Manchuria.

At the same time, the CCP's policies in Manchuria were also changing. CCP leaders believed that a favorable strategic position in Manchuria was vitally important. Mao in particular wanted a secure position there in order to break fundamentally with the CCP's perennial state of being under siege.[16] Soon after the Chongqing negotiations in the fall of 1945, the CCP Central Committee mapped out a plan to seize all of Manchuria with Soviet support.[17] But with the improvement of GMD–Soviet relations and the obstruction of the Soviet troops, the CCP had to abandon this plan. During the first two months of 1946, CCP leaders still adhered to the agreements reached at the GMD–CCP negotiations, and they told party members that "the tendency

16 Mao Zedong's telegram to Liu Shaoqi, July 9, 1942 , 434–45; Mao Zedong, "Conclusions at the Seventh CCP Congress," 218–19.

17 "The CCP Central Committee's Telegram," October 28, 1945, in *ZZWXJ*, vol. XV, 388–89.

towards peace was now firm."[18] In this context, they reluctantly decided in late January to "strive for a peaceful resolution" of the Manchuria issue.[19] The Soviets' warning that a civil war in Manchuria would "provoke American involvement" deepened the worries of CCP leaders who thought that, even if their army defeated the GMD, the United States would still send its troops into Manchuria.[20]

However, the CCP had its own precondition for any peaceful resolution of the Manchuria issue – that the Nationalist government should recognize the legitimacy of the CCP's presence in Manchuria. If that were not accepted, the CCP would have lost all of its hard-won gains from the war against Japan. In reality, Jiang Jieshi did not accept the CCP's position and, after taking Jinzhou in western Liaoning in January, GMD forces constantly attacked and occupied areas controlled by the CCP. The CCP already had a substantial strategic interest in the protection of Manchuria, which the Central Committee insisted would be threatened by repeated concessions, leading to "discord within the party."[21] Indeed, there had always existed hardline voices in the CCP army that could not be silenced.

The Soviet army began its quick withdrawal in early March, but no agreement could be reached between the GMD and the CCP over Manchuria. The CCP Central Committee decided to begin implementing a strategy of controlling northern Manchuria in late March, that is, seizing major cities such as Changchun and Harbin as well as the Eastern China Railway.[22] Certainly, the CCP's policy had the support of the Soviet army in the northeast; its rapid withdrawal provided the opportunity for the CCP to implement this strategy in the north of Manchuria. In early April, GMD forces launched large-scale attacks on CCP troops in Siping. On April 18, CCP troops seized Changchun as

18 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions," December 19, 1945, "The Central Military Commission's Deployment for Guarding Zhangjiakou and Chengde," December 29, 1945, *ibid*., 494–95, 526.

19 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions to the Northeast Bureau," January 26, 1946, *ibid*., vol. XVI, 57–58.

20 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions to the Northeast Bureau," December 7, 1945, *ibid*., vol. XV, 465–66; "Peng Zhen guanyu youren jinggao dongbei jue buneng da" [Peng Zhen's Remarks on Our Friend's Warning against Fighting in the Northeast], January 26, 1946, Central Archive, Beijing.

21 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions to the Northeast Bureau and CCP's Delegation in Chongqing regarding the Principle of the Negotiations," March 13, 1946, in *ZZWXJ*, vol. XVI, 89–91.

22 "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions to the Northeast Bureau," March 24, 1946, "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions to Lin Biao and Peng Zhen," March 25, 1946, *ibid*., vol. XVI, 100–03.

planned, and later took Harbin and Qiqihaer. Akin to lighting a powderkeg, the CCP–GMD military conflicts in Manchuria quickly set off a nationwide civil war.

The outbreak of the Chinese Civil War marked the end of a distinct period of international politics concerning China. On one hand, both the United States and the USSR subordinated China with respect to their broader agendas, and both powers withdrew their troops from the country. On the other hand, in the northeast, strategic cooperation between the CCP and the Soviet Union had begun. Soviet troops not only provided the opportunity for the CCP to take over the north of Manchuria, but also furnished weapons and equipment to CCP forces. At the same time, the CCP had concluded that the United States was their primary external enemy. In this manner, the future patterns of the Cold War in East Asia had already begun to appear.

## Alliance and confrontation

The event that truly determined China's foreign relations in 1947 and 1948 was the CCP's decisive victory in the civil war. In the face of this radical change, the responses of both the United States and the Soviet Union were gradual and passive. As the revolutionary movement developed, US influence in China steadily declined, until it finally disappeared completely. In contrast, Soviet political influence grew to the point that the USSR and the new Communist-dominated state, the PRC, came together in a formal alliance. After the CCP-led People's Liberation Army (PLA) seized Shenyang in November 1948, CCP leaders started to formulate the foreign policy of their new government. The CCP's cognitive framework, based on revolutionary theory, and the leadership's fundamental attitude to the growth in international tensions at that time largely influenced this change in CCP policy. Mao and his colleagues were Communist revolutionaries; they were deeply convinced that the Chinese revolutionary movement was a part of a worldwide Communist revolutionary movement. Regardless of the Cold War, this approach roughly determined the CCP leaders' attitude toward the United States and the USSR. Mao's concept of "leaning to one side" vividly revealed the basic tendency and choice of the CCP's leaders.

Nevertheless, one must note that the lean-to-one-side policy was really more like a broad statement of principle. Since it expressed only the CCP's general principle of managing foreign relations within the framework of US–Soviet confrontation, it obviously gave rise to few specific policies for managing foreign relations. In reality, the choices – of what kind of alliance with the

17. The Chinese Civil War left behind a devastated economy. Here people in Shanghai line up to exchange depreciated paper money for gold in 1948 – ten people were crushed to death in the melee that followed.

Soviet Union or which confrontations with the United States there were to be – were both the results of more complex decisionmaking processes.

At the end of 1947, when CCP leaders formed their strategy of overthrowing the GMD regime by force as soon as possible, Mao thought that relations with the Soviet Union would be the key to the new Chinese state's foreign policy and would serve as a model for its domestic development. He wanted to visit Stalin in Moscow to discuss these matters. Even if this proposition was never realized during the civil war, it did underscore the Chinese leadership's urgent wish to bolster relations with the USSR.

The CCP's gestures were not unrequited. In fact, beginning in the spring of 1948, Soviet aid to the CCP notably increased. After the PLA took over Manchuria in early November, Stalin deemed it necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the CCP's internal situation and its policies in various areas. He again assumed personal responsibility for the USSR's China policies. However, some of Stalin's policies met with staunch resistance from the CCP leadership. On January 10, 1949, Stalin telegraphed to the CCP Central Committee his suggestions for peace talks between the CCP and the GMD. Even if that was not his intention, Stalin's suggestions could have led to a division of China and, consequently, Mao categorically refused to follow his advice. Stalin had to backtrack.[23] This incident demonstrated to Soviet leaders

23 See Niu Jun, "The Origin of the Sino-Soviet Alliance," in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1945–1963* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1998), 64–65.

that they needed to study more intently the implications of the CCP's victory, as well as its domestic and foreign policies.

From early 1949 to the summer of that year, a number of top-level secret exchange visits occurred between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the CCP. On January 31, 1949, Anastas Mikoian visited the CCP Central Committee's headquarters at Xibaipo, and for three days held extensive talks with Mao and other CCP leaders. As a result of these talks, the two sides reached broad agreement on the CCP's domestic and foreign policies. Disagreements regarding future bilateral relations were left for later discussion. Mikoian's visit had a very positive impact on CCP–USSR relations. Mao praised Soviet aid to the CCP at its Central Committee meeting in March 1949, where he also essentially dictated the lean-to-one-side policy for the new regime.[24] This event marked the establishment of the CCP's policy of a formal alliance with the Soviet Union for the new Chinese state.

In late June, Liu Shaoqi led a senior delegation to visit Moscow, where it concluded agreements with Stalin on the substance of the CCP's domestic and foreign policies following the founding of its regime. This visit completed the CCP's preparations for an alliance with the Soviet Union; the only outstanding issues were how to deal with the Sino-Soviet treaty of August 1945, and whether a new treaty ought to take its place.

CCP leaders saw the 1945 treaty as problematic. When they were young, they had all gone through a process of committing themselves first to the patriotic cause *before* becoming self-avowed revolutionaries and being drawn to Communism. In their mind, "following the path of the Russians" signified not only the elimination of an exploitative social structure, but also the creation of a new international order wherein the first item on the agenda was to abolish all of the unequal treaties China had previously signed. In this light, the CCP leaders were dissatisfied with the August 1945 treaty and, during Mikoian's visit to Xibaipo, they explicitly questioned some of its basic features. Subsequently, when Liu Shaoqi visited Moscow, he proposed to Stalin three alternative solutions: first, that they preserve the treaty, which would be recognized by the new China; second, that they abolish the treaty and create a new one; or, third, through an exchange of notes, that the two countries agree to keep the status quo temporarily while preparing themselves for a new treaty. Stalin prevaricated on the issue, and this meant that the

24 Mao Zedong, "Report Delivered at the Second Plenary Meeting of the Seventh CCP Congress," March 5, 1949, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. IV, 1434–35.

question of the treaty was left to become the focus of the Stalin–Mao conversations after the founding of the PRC.

On December 16, 1949, having just arrived in Moscow, Mao held talks with Stalin on the treaty question. Stalin at first claimed that the time was not right for changing the old treaty. He suggested instead that a statement on the issue of Port Arthur would suffice. Only after Mao insisted on the complete termination of the old treaty did Stalin agree to make major revisions to it, though only after two years.[25] Clearly, Stalin was not ready to renounce the benefits that the Soviet Union itself had reaped from the old international order.

After Mao stood fast for another couple of weeks, and after several meetings between Stalin and his closest advisers, the Soviet leader's view began to change. During his talk with Molotov and Mikoian on January 2, 1950, Mao proposed three options: to sign a new Sino-Soviet treaty; alternatively, to have the official news agencies of the two countries issue a succinct communiqué announcing that agreements had been reached on the important questions; or, lastly, to issue a joint statement on the major points of bilateral relations. Molotov thought that the first option was the best. Mao immediately telegraphed Zhou to ask him to get ready for negotiations and to visit Moscow.[26]

Zhou Enlai arrived in Moscow on January 20. On January 22, Mao and Zhou talked with Stalin and determined the basic contents of the new treaty. After that, negotiations passed to the specifics, where the two sides took up key issues such as the use of the ports of Port Arthur and Dalian. In the end, the Soviets mostly agreed with the suggestions from the Chinese side but, citing the issue of military aid, Stalin insisted on a "supplementary agreement" that prohibited other countries from entering Manchuria and Xinjiang. The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance was signed on February 14, 1950, and marked the formal birth of the Sino-Soviet alliance. From that point on, the Soviet Union began to supply economic, financial, and military assistance to the PRC on a grand scale.

The story of CCP–US relations mirrors that of its relations with the USSR. As was the case with the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations, the fundamental ideological attitudes of CCP leaders prompted them to opt for confrontation

25 Pei Jianzhang (ed.), *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1949–1956* [History of the Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China, 1949–1956] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi, 1994), 17–18. See also Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War 1946–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 310–15.

26 "Mao Zedong's telegram to the CCP Central Committee," January 2 and 3, 1950, in Zhonggong zhongyang yanjiushi (ed. and comp.), *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian* [A Selection of Important Documents since the Founding of the People's Republic of China], 17 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1992), 95–96, 97.

with the United States. The Communist leadership also believed that the United States had become the major external threat to their final victory. During the last stage of the civil war and the founding of the PRC, the CCP lived in constant dread of various forms of US intervention, including a direct military intervention, schemes to sow division in the Chinese revolutionary camp, an embargo against the new China, or the obstruction of the final reunification of Taiwan with the mainland.[27]

Concerning the domestic environment, after more than two years of political mobilization, the CCP had cleansed both party and army of "US-fearing" or "US-admiring" thinking. Two events – the takeover of the US consulate after the seizure of Shenyang in November 1948 and the searching of US ambassador John Leighton Stuart's residence after seizing Nanjing in April 1949 – highlighted the prevailing anti-American sentiment among lower-rank PLA cadres and soldiers. The Central Committee had to take forceful measures to prevent overly zealous actions that might have triggered major international conflicts.

On the other hand, the CCP was also under considerable pressure from the Soviet Union. Soviet leaders distrusted the CCP's relations with the United States. Because the CCP leaders treated their relationship with the USSR as their top priority from the very beginning, it followed naturally that they would do everything required to dispel the doubts of their Soviet counterparts, even at the cost of any chance of developing relations with the United States. Although Stalin had said, before the PLA crossed the Yangtze River, that the CCP could establish relations with the United States and other Western countries, particularly trade relations, the Chinese Communist leadership doubted that such relations would do them any good.[28] It is likely that the CCP leaders did not want to take any chances when they were at a sensitive stage in the formation of their alliance with the Soviet Union.

The CCP's interactions with the United States during the period from late 1948 to the summer of 1949 came to have a significant influence on its US policy. These events included the arrest of US consulate staff in Shenyang in the winter of 1948 and the CCP representatives' covert contacts with US ambassador Stuart after the PLA took over Nanjing in April 1949. While the CCP arrest of US consul Angus Ward and his staff produced intense

27 "The Military Commission's Plan for Taking Over the Whole Country," May 23, 1949, "The Military Commission's Countermeasures for the Prevention of Imperialist Intervention in the Chinese Revolution," May 28, 1949, in *ZZWXJ*, vol. XVIII, 292–93, 308–09.

28 "Stalin's Cable to Kovalev," March 15, 1949, "Stalin's Cable to Mao," April 1949, as cited in Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 230–31.

resentment in Washington, the talks between Ambassador Stuart and Huang Hua, the CCP representative in Nanjing who was Stuart's former student, had no positive results. It could even be said that the interactions with Stuart disabused the top CCP leaders of any notion of developing normal relations with the United States, if they indeed had one at that time. On June 30, Mao Zedong published "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," in which he publicly announced that the new government would "lean to one side" in favor of the Soviet camp. Significantly, on the same day, the Central Committee telegraphed the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee to say that "we entertain no illusions that the US imperialists will change their policies [toward the Chinese revolution]."[29] When, during the summer of 1949, the United States withdrew all of its diplomats from China, Mao wrote in response:

> The war to turn China into a US colony, a war in which the United States of America supplies the money and guns and Chiang Kai-shek the men to fight for the United States and slaughter the Chinese people, has been an important component of the US imperialist policy of world-wide aggression since World War II. The US policy of aggression has several targets. The three main targets are Europe, Asia, and the Americas. China, the centre of gravity in Asia, is a large country with a population of 475 million; by seizing China, the United States would possess all of Asia. With its Asian front consolidated, US imperialism could concentrate its forces on attacking Europe. US imperialism considers its front in the Americas relatively secure. These are the smug overall calculations of the US aggressors.[30]

The CCP's victory overturned the existing postwar international order in East Asia, which was based on the Yalta agreement and the ensuing 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty. The new state of affairs was based on the *new* Sino-Soviet treaty signed in February 1950. Through its alliance with the USSR, the PRC now staked its initial position in the Cold War on standing alongside Moscow in confrontation with the United States.

### *Crossing the Yalu River*

The Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950. Previously, Chinese leaders had concentrated their attention on domestic matters, and the major tasks of the PLA had been to accelerate its entry into Tibet and to prepare for the takeover of Taiwan. Chinese leaders already regarded the United States as a major menace, but they did not believe that any American military threat was

29 "The CCP Central Committee's Telegram to the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee," June 30, 1949, Central Archive, Beijing.

30 *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), 434–35.

18. The chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong.

impending. At this time, both the Korean peninsula and Indochina were regions of tension. Of the two, China clearly saw the latter as more important. On the Korean peninsula, China hoped it would not have to intervene. From July 1949 to March–April 1950, three divisions of the Korean army (or more than 30,000 soldiers) that had fought in the Chinese Civil War were allowed to return, armed, to North Korea. Chinese leaders made this decision in part because they were concerned that North Korea might be attacked by South Korea, with possible Japanese assistance. On the other hand, these troops no longer had important duties in China. Allowing them to return to Korea was a logical component of disarmament at a time when the Chinese army was already being demobilized on a large scale.

In May 1949 – even as China made the decision to provide aid to North Korea – Mao explicitly told North Korean leaders that he did not approve of an attack on South Korea, and he continued to hold this position for some time.[31]

31 "Kovalev's Telegram to Stalin," May 18, 1949, in Academia Sinica (comp.), *Chaoxian zhanzheng: Eguo dang'anguan jiemi wenjian* [The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Russian Archives] (here after *Chaoxian zhanzheng*), 2 vols. (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2003), vol. I, 189–90.

Probably because he knew Mao's attitude, Stalin did not ask Kim Il Sung to consult Mao on North Korea's military plans until shortly before Stalin finally approved North Korea's attack in April 1950. On May 13, when Mao learned from Kim of the joint proposal by the USSR and North Korea, he first verified it with the Soviets, and then decided not to oppose Kim's planned offensive in South Korea, as he knew that China was in no position to challenge Stalin's decision.[32] Nevertheless, Chinese leaders did not really focus on the situation on the Korean peninsula during the early stages of the war, immediately after June 25, 1950, because they saw it as a Soviet responsibility.

In addition to the basic solidarity that existed between Chinese and Korean Communists, the main reason behind the Chinese leaders' decision to enter the Korean War in the fall of 1950 was their reevaluation of the overall situation in East Asia after the success of the American military intervention. The military deployments undertaken by the Truman administration were extensive; the United States not only used force on the Korean peninsula, but also strengthened its military presence in the Taiwan Strait and in Southeast Asia. These actions led Chinese leaders to think that the United States was about to engage in a strategic expansion against China. At a Politburo meeting on August 4, Mao said that "if the US imperialists were to succeed, they would be complacent, and would threaten us."[33] Zhou's talk in the August 26 meeting on national defense highlighted the Chinese leadership's concern with a possible "domino effect" caused by US intervention.[34]

In terms of the specific decisionmaking process, two events made a Chinese entry into the Korean War highly likely. First, when the United States dispatched troops to Korea, it also imposed a blockade of the Taiwan Strait. Essentially, the civil war in China had been a war for the reunification of the country, and the US presence in the Taiwan Strait therefore directly contradicted the final goals of the CCP. To Chinese leaders, the blockade constituted intolerable aggression. In fact, the American blockade of the strait forced the PRC to abandon a campaign to take over Taiwan and, in doing so, facilitated the redeployment of several PLA army corps to the Korean border where they would confront the United States. On July 7, the Central Military Commission

32 "Stalin's Telegram to Mao Zedong," May 14, 1950, in *Chaoxian zhanzheng*, vol. I, 384.

33 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu* [Reflections on Several Important Decisions and Events], 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang dangxiao, 1991), vol. I, 43.

34 Zhou Enlai, "Prepare Adequately for Immediate Victory," August 26, 1950, in the Central Documents Research Institute and the Military Science Academy (ed. and comp.), *Zhou Enlai junshi wenxuan* [Selected Military Papers of Zhou Enlai], 4 vols. (Beijing: Renmin, 1997), vol. IV, 43–45.

decided to form an army for border defense in the northeast. Marshal Su Yu, who had been the intended commander for the invasion of Taiwan, was now appointed commander-in-chief and political commissar of the border defense army. The Ninth Corps, previously assigned to the attack on Taiwan, and the Nineteenth Corps, previously scheduled for demobilization, were instead concentrated along the Long Hai and Jin Pu railways in order to be transferred quickly to the northeast.

Second, the crossing of the thirty-eighth parallel by US troops finally prompted Chinese leaders to enter the Korean War. When the war took a dramatic turn after the Inchon landing on September 15, Chinese leaders began sending warning signals to Washington that US troops should not cross the thirty-eighth parallel. On October 3, Zhou Enlai sent an ultimatum via the Indian ambassador to China, saying that if the American troops crossed the parallel "we would not just be by-standers; we would intervene."[35] The US leadership never took Zhou's warning seriously, and on October 7 their troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. From that point on, in fact, it was inevitable that Chinese troops would, in some form, cross the Yalu River.

Although hostility to the United States played the key role in China's decision to enter the Korean War, the decisionmaking process was complicated by considerations of how to handle Sino-Soviet relations. After the North Korean reverses, Stalin asked for China's assistance in Korea, and leaders in Beijing found it difficult to say no because of China's subordinate role in the alliance. Proponents of a massive Chinese intervention – first and foremost Mao Zedong himself – could not have persuaded their comrades to intervene if it had not been for Stalin's willingness to meet Mao's minimum preconditions in terms of Soviet aid, including a guarantee that the Soviets would prevent the war from being expanded into China.

On October 1, after being asked to do so both by the Soviets and the North Koreans, Mao made the decision to enter the war. Yet because he did not have majority support, he did not send the telegram that he had drafted to that effect. He explained to the Soviet ambassador on October 3 that some policymakers did not support China's entry into the Korean War out of concern that direct Sino-American confrontation would set back China's plans for peaceful reconstruction. They were also worried, he said, that disaffection might arise within China.[36]

35 "Zhou Enlai's talk," October 3, 1950, *ibid.*, vol. IV, 67–68.
36 "Rochshin's Telegram to Stalin," October 8, 1950, in *Chaoxian zhanzheng*, vol. 2, 380–81.

At the beginning of the war, Stalin had kept China in the position of a limited participant. But at the decisive juncture of North Korea's failure to repulse US troops, he urged China to send troops, and tried to sway the Chinese leaders as best he could. In an October 5 telegram to Mao, Stalin cited the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty. He said that the United States had not made adequate preparations for a large-scale war and that, if the Americans were to carry the war into China itself, the USSR would assist in repelling them. He also noted that China's entry into the war would force the United States to make concessions, and that Washington would "have to abandon Taiwan." If China did not send troops, in contrast, then it would not "even get Taiwan back."[37] At about the same time that Stalin sent this telegram, the CCP Central Committee took the final decision to send troops to Korea. It is unclear whether Mao had yet received Stalin's telegram at that point, but Stalin's reaffirmation of the promises in the Sino-Soviet treaty certainly played a role by encouraging Chinese leaders to overcome their fears that war might spread into their own country.

Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao left Beijing for Moscow on October 8. In discussions on October 11, Stalin agreed to provide any military aid necessary to China. Yet, on the issue of Soviet air cover for China's troops as they entered the Korean peninsula, he stated explicitly that it would be impossible for the Soviet air force to enter the war immediately. What it could do, Stalin said, was to help bolster air cover for China itself.[38] Stalin's promise was very significant because it convinced the Chinese leaders that the PRC would not have to worry about US air assaults in China proper while its troops fought on the Korean peninsula.

However, Stalin's reluctance to provide air cover for Chinese troops in Korea undoubtedly made some of the preparations extremely difficult for China. Mao telegraphed Zhou many times, instructing him to urge the USSR to make a resolute and explicit promise to provide military equipment and to enter the war itself within two months. At this time, some Chinese leaders also envisaged that their troops would be engaged primarily in a defensive strategy, and would not launch attacks on US forces.[39]

37 "Stalin's Letter to Kim Il Sung," October 8, 1950, in *ibid.*, vol. II, 386–88.

38 See Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Si Dalin yu chaoxian zhanzheng* [Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin, 2003), 239–40.

39 "Mao Zedong's Telegram to Zhou Enlai," October 13, 1950, "Mao Zedong's Telegram to Zhou Enlai," October 14, 1950, "Mao Zedong's Telegram to Zhou Enlai," October 15, 1950, in *Dang de wenxian* [CCP Documents], 5 (2000) 7–8, 10.

Around October 14, Chinese leaders essentially finalized their strategic plan and war objectives. They wanted to prevent the Korean War from expanding into China proper, to stop the United States from occupying the northern regions of Korea close to the Chinese border, and to help the North Korean regime survive. According to Mao's instructions, once Chinese troops entered the Korean peninsula, they were to be deployed in suitable positions so they could set up defensive lines. They were not to undertake offensive operations for six months. As Mao said on October 14, he meant "to push the national defense line toward Deokcheon, Yeogwon as well as south of them – assuring this will be of great benefit [to us]."[40] On October 18, based on Zhou Enlai's reports from the negotiations with the USSR, Chinese leaders again reviewed their decision to send troops to Korea, and gave the go-ahead for troops to enter. The following day Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River.

After finding conditions on the ground in North Korea to be to their advantage, China's army launched its first offensive campaign on October 25, 1950. From that time until July 27, 1953, China fought a large-scale regional war against the United States. This war – the PRC's first – had major consequences for the new state's international orientation.

The Korean conflict immediately brought the newly founded PRC to the forefront of the Cold War in East Asia. China's alliance with the USSR was strengthened and broadened, creating a much closer relationship between the two parties than had ever existed in the past. Equally important, China's antagonism toward the United States was deepened and made more permanent. The realities of war created perceptions among CCP leaders of a much more ominous world outside their region. The parameters of the Cold War in Asia, thus established, would remain unchanged for a long time to come.[41]

40 "Mao Zedong's Telegram to Zhou Enlai," October 14, 1950.

41 For additional information on the Korean War and the Sino–Soviet alliance, see the chapters by William Stueck and Shu Guang Zhang in this volume.


5. Cold War East Asia and the Korean War (inset).


RUSSIA
Amur River
(Heilong Jiang)
MANCHURIA
Harbin
Ulan Bator
MONGOLIA
Changchun
Vladivostok
Sea of Japan
JAPAN
Shenyang
NORTH KOREA
Great Wall
Pyongyang
Tokyo
Baotou
Beijing
Tianjin
Dalian
Seoul
Yellow
Taiyuan
SHANDONG
SOUTH KOREA
Qingdao
Yanan
Lanzhou
CHINA
Xian
East China Sea
Nanjing
Shanghai
PACIFIC
Yangtze
Wuhan
Hangzhou
Chengdu
OCEAN
Okinawa
Chongqing
Changsha
Mazu
Fuzhou
Taiwan Strait
Guiyang
Taipei
Diaoyu Islands
Jinmen
TAIWAN
Guangzhou
Shenzhen
Kaoshiung
Pearl River
Hong Kong
Macao
Lang Son
Guam
Hanoi
Haiphong
NORTH VIETNAM
Hainan
South China Sea
LAOS
THAI-LAND
Manila
PHILIPPINES
Paracel Islands
SOUTH VIETNAM
CAMBODIA
Spratley Islands
BRUNEI
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA
0 100 200 km
0 50 100 miles
Manchuria
SOVIET UNION
CHINA
Oct.–Nov. 1950: line of farthest UN advance
Chosan
Yalu River
Choshin Res.
Sea of Japan
NORTH KOREA
July 1953: armistice line
P'yongyang
25 June 1950: North Korea attacks South Korea across 38th parallel
Kaesong
38°
Panmunjom
Seoul
Inchon
Jan. 1951: UN forces are pushed back by Chinese-North Korean troops
SOUTH KOREA
Yellow Sea
Sep. 1950: line of farthest North Korean advance
Pusan
JAPAN