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## Chinese intervention in the Korean War

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# **CHINESE INTERVENTION IN THE KOREAN WAR**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Interdepartmental Program  
In Liberal Arts

by  
Harry M. Crocker  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In late October 1950, the People's Republic of China (PRC) committed approximately 260,000 troops to combat in North Korea. The initial Chinese decision to intervene in the Korean conflict was based on a misperception of American commitment to halt communist expansion. American actions seemed to communicate the desire to avoid confrontation. The withdrawal of U.S. troops and the limited equipping and training of the South Korean army implied Washington's lack of interest in the fate of Korea. Therefore, Mao endorsed North Korea's proposal for the military reunification of Korea. China stood to gain international prestige and access to Soviet equipment and training at little cost. But the North Korean attack collapsed following the commitment of American and United Nations forces.

Chinese troops attacked and surprised the UN forces, inflicting heavy losses while driving them down the peninsula in disarray. Mao desired the quick expulsion of UN forces from Korea. To this end, the Chinese launched five brutal offensives between October 1950 and April 1951, but failed to realize their goal of imposing a communist government on an unified Korea.

Following the commencement of hostilities, the Chinese exaggerated their own military capabilities and underestimated the firepower and general effectiveness of American forces. But the Chinese army was unable to assimilate modern weaponry and tactics and, facing immense logistical difficulties, could not use its superior numbers to overwhelm United Nations forces. Inaccurate political and military assessments by Chinese leaders served to deny the PRC its goal of a unified Korea while ensuring it would be embroiled in a long and costly war.

## INTRODUCTION

On the night of October 19, 1950, the first of approximately 260,000 soldiers belonging to the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF) began their historic trek from northeastern China down into the Korean Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Their objective, ostensibly, was to confront the United States and bring an end to American imperialist aggression against their North Korean brothers. In reality, they marched to bolster the rapidly collapsing North Korean People's Army (NKPA), which had failed in its bid to reunify Korea forcibly under a communist government. The Chinese expected to achieve a decisive victory over the American "Paper Tiger" and its "Running Dog" allies. In what would become a bloody war of attrition, the dogged determination of the United Nations Command (UNC) forces would not only dispel any Chinese hopes of a rapid victory, but would inflict over 539,000 casualties on the CPVF.<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the Chinese decision to intervene in the Korean War are rooted in misinterpretation, miscommunication and inaccurate assessments of both friendly and enemy military forces. China correctly identified the United States' failure to realize Korea's geographically strategic importance. However, Mao failed to note America's growing commitment to contain the spread of communism and the impact this commitment would have on any Communist-sponsored aggression. The United States had clearly demonstrated that commitment in its active efforts to suppress Communist activities in Greece and, more recently, in the Philippines. A special study (NSC-68) by the National Security Council in 1950 laid out in writing, the United States' official policy of all-out containment.

The confusion of the Chinese Civil War and the United States' decisive measures to deny formal diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China precluded effective

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<sup>1</sup> Xiaobing Li, Allan R. Millett and Bin Yu, *Mao's General's Remember*, pp. 5, 62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

communication between the two nations. The inability of both United States and Chinese foreign policy officials to understand each other's thought processes led to further miscommunication. In essence, each nation viewed the other's statements and actions through its own ethno-centric filters. As a result, both nations grossly underestimated not only the intentions and capabilities of their opponent, but also their level of determination to succeed in their endeavors.

Neither China nor the United States confined its mutual incomprehension to the area of politics. This fault also manifested itself in assessments of their respective military forces. China exaggerated the capabilities of the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF), whose soldiers constituted the CPVF. At the same time, Beijing greatly underestimated the determination, mobility and firepower of the United Nations Command forces and failed to take note of the increasingly important role of air power on the modern battlefield. Although the CPVF was extremely successful in identifying and exploiting many of its opponent's weaknesses, Chinese errors in adapting to modern technology proved to be critical. The UNC's high mobility and increased firepower, which the Chinese trivialized, played a pivotal role in prolonging the conflict and denying the CPVF and the NKPA their ultimate victory.

The United States also fell prey to the error of inaccurate assessment. Insufficient regional intelligence assets combined with a lack of expertise in interpreting intelligence data to ensure that the United States' picture of ongoing events in Korea would remain distorted. Throughout the conflict, the United States retained an unshaken belief in its national level intelligence agencies and their abilities to anticipate enemy actions, despite the failure of those same agencies to predict the NKPA's attack on the Republic of Korea. The repeated failure of

the American intelligence network to gauge enemy strength and intentions accurately ensured that UN forces would be taken by surprise not once, but twice!

An inaccurate assessment of Chinese military capabilities compounded the error. The United States based its assessments on its military advisory teams' observations of Chinese *Nationalist* forces during World War II and the Chinese Civil War. Closer examination of these reports would have revealed that, while contact with Chinese Communist forces during the period of observation had been limited, it had resulted in an elevated opinion of Communist force capabilities compared to those of the Nationalist forces. George F. Kennan perhaps best expressed American opinion at the time of the Chinese forces in general when he said that "in any war of the foreseeable future China could at best be a weak ally or at worse an inconsequential enemy."<sup>3</sup>

The inability of China and the United States to identify and correct such deficiencies was directly responsible for their confrontation in Korea in 1950. Failure to communicate strategic intent in a clear fashion resulted from both Chinese and American misinterpretation of each other's regional actions. Likewise, failure to grasp correctly the potential of their opponent's military forces led both sides to exaggerate their own military capabilities. These combined errors served to ensure a conflict in Korea would be costly to both nations.

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<sup>3</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1950-1963*, p. 47.



## CHAPTER 1

### A POLITICAL HISTORY OF KOREA (1945-1950)



MAP 1

From: Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951  
Center of Military History, 1990  
By Billy C. Mossman

Korea's historical geographic importance directly influenced its post-World War II fate, ensuring that it would become a point of contention between the Western and the Communist powers. Its strategic location, for the two major Communist states, led almost inevitably to Soviet and Chinese support of North Korean offensive action against the Republic of Korea. The United States' indecisiveness in establishing and conducting foreign policy in the Far East would prove to be the other critical factor in creating the conditions for war in Korea.

Korea's regional strategic importance lay primarily in its significance as a historical path of invasion between Manchuria and Japan. At the turn of the 20th century, Russia and Japan

began a bitter struggle for dominance in Manchuria and both nations considered control of Korea to be vital. Aggressive competition led to armed conflict in April 1904. By August 1905, Czarist Russia had proven to be the weaker nation as it suffered military defeat at the hands of Japan and fell prey to internal domestic upheaval. The Russian Communist Party's seizure of power in 1917 did nothing to alter the *status quo*. The Japanese succeeded in achieving a state of regional military dominance. By 1945, however, the imminent collapse of their empire signaled a change.

The Soviets, in compliance with the Potsdam Treaty, declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945. This action presented the Allies with the problem of delineating post-war demarcation lines for the occupying Soviet and American troops. The U.S. Army's War Department Operations and Plans Division proposed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as a dividing line in Korea and the Soviets readily accepted. Following the Japanese surrender on August 14, Soviet troops immediately moved to the parallel and sealed the border. In September, U.S. forces secured Korea south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

The United States and the Soviet Union conducted negotiations for the establishment of a united Korea from 1945 to 1948, but differing national agendas ensured that the talks were in vain. In 1948 the United Nations adopted an American proposal to hold free elections to decide the fate of Korea. Though the North, tutored by Moscow, declined to participate, the South went ahead with the elections and chose Syngman Rhee as the first president of the Republic of Korea. The North immediately responded by establishing the People's Democratic Republic of Korea under Kim Il Sung.

The same UN proposal also called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea. Both the Soviet Union and the United States complied with the "letter" of the proposal, if not with the "spirit," and withdrew the majority of their forces. However, foreign troops remained in both

zones of occupation in the form of advisory groups. While Soviet advisors concentrated on building and training the fledgling North Korean People's Army (NKPA), the 500-man United States Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) devoted its efforts to developing a South Korean police force to maintain internal security. According to John Muccio, American Ambassador to Korea from 1949 to 1952, "very little was done in training and organizing [the] military; an army or navy."<sup>4</sup>

Both North and South Korea found the concept of a divided nation unacceptable and refused to recognize the "border" at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Each claimed to be the legitimate government of Korea and advocated forced reunification. To that end, the NKPA received new equipment and developed its capabilities under Soviet tutelage. The Republic of Korea Army (ROKA), however, remained a force in name only. As early as 1947, Washington had been "looking for a way to get out of Korea."<sup>5</sup> As such, it was in the best interest of the United States to ensure that the ROKA remained incapable of conducting offensive combat operations. A ROKA without teeth would be incapable of initiating a war with the North, allowing the U.S to withdraw its forces peacefully. Harry S. Truman, U.S. President during the Korean War, stated in his memoirs that his decision in favor of an American withdrawal from South Korea was based, in part, on his desire to avoid U.S. entanglement in political arguments between the ROK and the DPRK.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the growing disparity in military force capabilities, Kim Il Sung sounded the Soviet Union and the newly established People's Republic of China about the possibility of support for an invasion of South Korea.

Soviet regional interests in Asia centered on border security. The recent creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) should have dispelled Stalin's concerns but this was not the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard D. McKinzie, oral interview of John J. Muccio, 7 December 1973, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/muccio3.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Richard D. McKinzie, oral interview of Niles W. Bond, 28 December 1973, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/bond.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, p. 329.

case. Mao Zedong had risen to power in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the expense of the pro-Soviet faction. In Moscow's eyes, therefore, his loyalty to communism was suspect. Additionally, while Soviet communism was based on the belief that the urban proletariat would initiate revolution, Mao's interpretation of communism was based on a revolution led by the peasant population. Mao's break from Soviet doctrine was based, logically, on the fact that China was an agricultural nation. Chinese logic, however, did nothing to alleviate Moscow's wariness.<sup>7</sup> Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai's declaration on October 1, 1949 that Beijing was ready to "establish diplomatic relations with any and all governments"<sup>8</sup> deepened Stalin's misgivings.

Stalin was aware that the United States desired to create a split between the Soviet Union and China, as evidenced by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's claim that the Soviets were out to subjugate China.<sup>9</sup> The chances seemed slender that the PRC would emulate Yugoslavia and become a Communist state independent of the Soviet Union, but Stalin's continued refusal to meet with Mao<sup>10</sup> had done nothing to establish a mutual bond between the two nations. President Harry S. Truman's announcement on January 5, 1950 that the United States would no longer provide aid to Taiwan<sup>11</sup> seemed to suggest that Washington would acquiesce in a Communist takeover of the Nationalist stronghold. This seemed to pose a further threat to Soviet far-east security by creating the opportunity for the United States and the PRC to reach a diplomatic accommodation. In order to forestall this event, and the concomitant threat of an independent China, The Soviet Union would have to direct its efforts towards securing some

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<sup>7</sup> Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners; Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, pp. 25-28.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out; Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of conversation between V.M. Molotov, A.Y. Vyshinsky and Mao Zedong, 17 January 1950, by V. M. Molotov, in Odd Arne Westad, "Fighting for Friendship: Mao, Stalin and the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950," pp. 232-234.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224. See also Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, p. 28 and Patrick C. Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 52, 60-62.

kind of cooperative understanding with Beijing. Such an agreement would demonstrate to the world that the China stood solidly in the Communist camp.

In light of these considerations, Korea began to assume a position of increasing importance in Soviet strategic concerns. A joint Soviet-Chinese venture in support of the proposed North Korean invasion of South Korea would strengthen their diplomatic bonds. The USSR could further enhance the mutual spirit of “brotherhood” by providing equipment and training to the CCF. The disastrous Chinese assaults on the Nationalist held islands of Matsu and Quemoy had clearly demonstrated the CCF’s need for such assistance.<sup>12</sup> Providing aid to Beijing would also establish its dependency on the USSR and give Stalin a stronger hand in negotiating a continued Soviet presence in Chinese territories.

The involvement of Chinese forces in Korea would also ensure that Beijing was too preoccupied to continue offensive action against Taiwan and reduce the possibility of American armed intervention on behalf of the Nationalists. Careful redirection of Mao’s attention away from Taiwan would eliminate the likelihood of a general war between China and the America and reduce the possibility that the USSR could be drawn into a direct confrontation with the U.S. Stalin’s assumptions on this point proved highly accurate. Following the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the Chinese would first postpone, and then cancel, their planned assault on Taiwan.<sup>13</sup>

However, American intervention on behalf of the Republic of Korea remained a possibility. As early as December 1949, Stalin recognized that, but he dismissed the idea. “The Americans are afraid of war,” he said simply.<sup>14</sup> American intervention would serve only to hinder the establishment of friendly diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC while it would reinforce the Chinese position in the Communist camp. Stalin further expressed

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<sup>12</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 50. See also Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> Chen Jian, “The Sino-Soviet Alliance and China’s Entry into the Korean War,” p. 26. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Mao Zedong to Liu Shaoqi, 18 December 1949, in Chen Jian, “Comparing Russian and Chinese Sources: A New Point of Departure for Cold War History,” p. 20.

the belief that, should the Soviet Union and the United States become involved in a confrontation, it would be better to face the Americans now, when China and the USSR were stronger militarily than the United States and Great Britain.<sup>15</sup> Stalin thus came to consider North Korean offensive action against the Republic of Korea a “win-win” situation for the Soviet Union. Chinese sentiments were not too different, though for other reasons.

Just as Stalin was suspicious of Mao’s intentions, so, too, was Mao suspicious of the Soviet Communist Party. Apparent Soviet designs on Chinese territory were chief among Mao’s concerns. The USSR maintained garrisons in Sinkiang and Manchuria under its 1945 treaty with the Nationalist Chinese. Stalin had even gone so far as to make Outer Mongolia a Soviet satellite state in 1924, a fact the treaty had ratified.<sup>16</sup> Mao clearly understood the intensity of Stalin’s desire to maintain a Soviet presence in China. This was particularly true with regard to the port of Dalian and the Manchurian Railroad. Mao demonstrated his understanding by broaching the subject as the opening topic in his treaty negotiations with Stalin.<sup>17</sup>

Stalin had created further tension with his blunt statement to a group of Chinese visitors in 1946 that the Communist movement in China had no future and that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) should dissolve its army and join the Nationalist Guomindang (GMD). Further insult was added by the Soviet maintenance of diplomatic relations with the Chinese Nationalist government until shortly before the end of the civil war. Increasing Soviet appreciation of the CCP and its abilities did not come until 1947, when CCF operations had the Nationalist forces withdrawing in all regions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Stalin to Kim Il Sung, 8 October 1950, in Alexandre Y. Mansourov, in “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War September 16-October 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” pp. 101, 116.

<sup>16</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 2-5. See also Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> Record of conversation between Stalin and Mao, 16 December 1949, in “Stalin’s Conversations with Chinese Leaders,” p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 47-48 and Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 23.

Yet, Mao understood that the USSR would be his benefactor in Asia and he believed that the United States was not interested in an independent China. The awarding of the German concession to Japan in 1919, at Washington's instigation, seemed to have demonstrated the American's intent to maintain Western dominance in China. The fact remained that the Soviet Union was a Communist state. As such, and despite differences, the USSR would be the most reliable ally Mao was likely to find.

Other factors affected Chinese opinions concerning Korea. For one thing, there was its geographical importance as a historical gateway for the invasion of Manchuria. Between 1868 and 1945, Japan had launched ten invasions of China, the majority of them through the Korean peninsula. Japanese attempts to conquer Manchuria had been responsible for the deaths of 35 million Chinese and an economic loss of approximately \$500 billion (in 1937 Chinese currency).<sup>19</sup> Manchuria was the traditional center of China's heavy metals industry and possessed large deposits of coal, limestone and iron-ore, all of which are required for the production of steel. So long as western imperialist powers had access to the Korean peninsula, the threat to Manchuria and China remained.

Mao also recognized the possibility that action against the Republic of Korea could result in a confrontation with the United States; however, he agreed with Stalin that the threat was negligible.<sup>20</sup> It would seem that Chinese officials were more focused on political opportunities than on possible risks. The Communists had just secured a major victory by forcing the Nationalist forces from the mainland and in the "flush of victory" PRC strategists paid little heed to risks.

Mao's commitment to action against the democratic South would allow the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to unite the Chinese people by feeding on their long-held resentment of

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<sup>19</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Mao Zedong to Liu Shaoqi, 18 December 1949, Chen Jian, "Comparing Russian and Chinese Sources," p. 20.

the Western powers' historical exploitation of China. Additionally, such enthusiastic support by the general population would give the CCP a free hand to eliminate Chinese dissidents. Should the United States choose to intervene, China would gain the opportunity to demonstrate that it would no longer tolerate foreign meddling in Asian affairs and that it was not afraid to act to further the Communist revolutionary movement.<sup>21</sup> Mao seems to have believed that a confrontation with the United States in Asia was inevitable. As such, Korea offered the most favorable terms, both politically and militarily, for the Chinese to engage the Americans.

American policy in Asia played a pivotal role in establishing conditions for the outbreak of hostilities in Korea. American actions and public statements often seemed inconsistent with official policy. The result was Washington's failure to convey accurately its intentions to either the USSR or the PRC. American foreign policy in the Far East contributed to the outbreak of war by unwittingly communicating a desire to avoid confrontation with the Communists. To Mao and Stalin this translated directly into a lack of commitment to preserving the current balance of power in Asia.

Above all, the United States desired to avoid military entanglement *in Korea*. John H. Muccio, U.S. Ambassador to Korea from 1949 to 1952, summed up the general American consensus at the time. "United States policy since 1947 was against getting involved militarily [in Korea]," he claimed.<sup>22</sup> Niles Bond, a member of General Douglas MacArthur's political advisory staff reinforces this sentiment. "The military never felt, and I don't think the political side of the government did either, that we had any long term interest in Korea," he stated.<sup>23</sup> The unwillingness of the government of the Republic of Korea to cooperate with the United States,

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<sup>21</sup> Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism, China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> McKinzie, Oral interview of John J. Muccio.

<sup>23</sup> McKinzie, Oral interview of Niles W. Bond.



which itself derived from the belief that South Korea had simply traded Japanese overlords for American ones, contributed greatly to the United States' desire to quit Korea.<sup>24</sup>

The United States was aware that the possibility of a North Korean invasion of the ROK existed but in the face of myriad Communist threats worldwide, the defense of South Korea was not deemed an over-riding concern. Additionally, the threat of Communist Chinese aid to such an invasion was completely overlooked. On September 25, 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted an evaluation report to President Truman. The report claimed that "the continued maintenance of 45,000 men ... in South Korea" could only be justified if "the *Soviets* establish military strength in [North] Korea capable of mounting an assault on Japan" (*italics added*). Furthermore, the report advocated U.S. withdrawal from Korea based on a projected increase in internal disorder. Unless the U.S. was willing to invest in South Korea on a massive scale, such conditions would eventually render the American presence untenable and would result in the U.S. being forced to withdraw under conditions of duress. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs, it was better to withdraw before such events came to pass.<sup>25</sup>

American withdrawal was further facilitated by U.S. military claims that the ROKA was fully capable of defending South Korea. On March 22, 1949, General Douglas MacArthur claimed that ROK security forces were trained and combat-ready.<sup>26</sup> General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, received a similar assessment from the Chief of the U.S. Korean Military Advisory Group in the ROK, General William L. Roberts, who claimed, "[The ROKA could] meet any test the North Koreans imposed on it."<sup>27</sup>

Balancing the American feeling of frustration with South Korea was official United States policy. The National Security Council study (NSC-68) clearly defined American

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<sup>24</sup> Jerry N. Hess, Oral interview of John J. Muccio. 18 February 1971, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/muccio1.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, pp. 318, 325-326, 331.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>27</sup> Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life*, p. 530

determination to contain the spread of communism, explicitly stating that the United States would not tolerate Soviet aggression, no matter where it occurred. The United States would act regardless of whether the Soviet Union or one of its proxies initiated aggression and without consideration for the strategic value of the victimized nation.<sup>28</sup>

By early 1950, the Truman administration had determined that South Korea was not sufficiently important, from a strategic standpoint, to warrant American military action to prevent a North Korean takeover.<sup>29</sup> General Douglas MacArthur and Secretary of State Dean Acheson had clearly conveyed this fact to the world in their definitions of the United States' defensive perimeter in Asia, both of which had excluded Korea and Taiwan.<sup>30</sup> Congressional defeat of the Korean Aid Bill and President Truman's speech on January 5, 1950 further confirmed this decision. Stalin and Mao seem to have interpreted this as American indifference to Kim Il Sung's planned military reunification of Korea.

It is important at this point to note that the United States believed, as the title of NSC-7 (*The Position of the United States with Respect to Soviet-Directed World Communism*) suggested, that communism was a Soviet-directed worldwide plot to achieve global dominance. Accordingly, the United States would view the NKPA's military action against South Korea as a *Soviet* challenge to American resolve. As such, it would require a response. Washington's indifference toward the fate of the Korean Peninsula may seem inconsistent with the American determination to confront Soviet expansionism; however, United States' actions *did not* contradict United States policy. Careful extrapolation reveals the true American message that, while Washington would not tolerate Soviet-sponsored aggression, it would accede to North Korean subjugation of South Korea by any *non-military* means.

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. National Security Council NSC 68: *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, sections III, V and Conclusions. Document located at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nsc-68/nsc68-1.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Kathryn Weathersby, "New Findings on the Korean War," p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 5, 21-22 and Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years at the State Department*, pp. 355-358.

The United States initiated these actions based on official estimates of Soviet capabilities and intentions, which NSC-7 and NSC-68 incorporated into their text.<sup>31</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) provided these estimates on an annual basis. In 1948, the CIA correctly noted, “Prevailing conditions throughout the Far East continue to be adverse to U.S. strategic interests and favorable to the extension of Soviet influence.”<sup>32</sup> In May 1949, the CIA concluded that the Soviet Union had no interest in Korea and would confine its activities to Scandinavia, Yugoslavia and Iran. In the Agency’s view, Moscow was, “unlikely to resort to even localized direct military action, except possibly with respect to Finland and Yugoslavia.”<sup>33</sup> As late as February 20, 1950, though continuing to cite American vulnerability in the Far East, the CIA still demonstrated a muddled view of the regional events. The CIA continued to argue that the Soviet Union would be preoccupied with asserting its control over Communist China and that Communist efforts in Asia would be confined to Indochina.<sup>34</sup> It thus becomes clear that United States’ Euro-centric view of world affairs precluded it from accurately predicting Communist intentions in the Far East.

Washington’s errors in identifying possible Communist intentions were not confined to its assessment of the Soviet Union. Dean Acheson’s abrupt dismissal of China as a regional power with his statement, “China, even under communism, cannot be a springboard for attack,”<sup>35</sup> highlighted a disastrous underestimation of Communist Chinese capabilities. Dean Acheson based his assessment, in part, on the belief that Communist China would be preoccupied with consolidating power in its newly established nation, following the CCF’s victory over the

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<sup>31</sup> USNSC, NSC-7, *The Position of the United States with Respect to Soviet-Directed World Communism, Analysis*, document located at <http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/corehistorians/powers/text/s17forei.htm#Title>. See also USNSC, NSC-68, section V.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Review of the World Situation*, 14 July 1948, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Possibility of Direct Soviet Military Action During 1949*, 3 May 1949, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Soviet Intentions and Capabilities*, 20 February 1950, pp. 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 20.

Nationalist forces.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the U. S. assumed that China would attempt to avoid any involvement in regional affairs.

The American military's misguided denigration of CCF capabilities underlay Acheson's judgement. However, the United States had done the CCF a grave injustice by basing these estimates on select portions of reports, which the U.S. Dixie Mission advisors had filed during World War II. Though these reports had indicated the superiority of Communist over Nationalist forces and had even predicted Communist victory in the event of a Chinese civil war, American observers tended to focus on Nationalist incompetence. The statement by General David G. Barr, advisor to Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, best demonstrated the American opinion of Chinese *Communist* forces. "Their [i.e., the GMD's] military debacles in my opinion can be attributed to the world's worst leadership [,] . . . the complete ineptness of high military leaders and the widespread corruption and dishonesty throughout the Armed Forces."<sup>37</sup> Thus, American estimates of Chinese Communist capabilities were based on observations of Chinese *Nationalist* forces.

Other American actions contributed to the false impression of American intent. Washington, for example, did not intervene on behalf of the Nationalist forces prior to their expulsion from the mainland.<sup>38</sup> The withdrawal of U. S. troops from the Far East served as another signal of the American desire to avoid confrontation. Between 1947 and 1950, The United States had reduced its defensive forces in the region by more than half.<sup>39</sup> To make matters worse, the forces that remained were not only under-strength, but also under-funded and outfitted primarily with obsolete World War II-era equipment.<sup>40</sup> Though these actions were the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>37</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 15, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>39</sup> Jerry N. Hess, Oral interview of Karl R. Bendetsen, 21 November 1972, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/bendet3.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 7 and Russell Spurr, *Enter the Dragon; China's Undeclared War Against the U.S. in Korea, 1950-51*, p. 137.

result of larger national considerations, they reinforced the Communist belief that the United States would not intervene on the Asian mainland.

Washington's implementation of its Far East foreign policy combined with inaccurate estimates of Soviet and Chinese intentions to assist in establishing the conditions for war in Korea. The United States' failure to recognize the geographical and strategic importance of Korea to the Soviet Union and Communist China was pivotal in undermining the ability of the Truman administration to convey accurately its intentions in the region. The Soviet Union and the PRC also contributed by underestimating their adversary and failing to communicate clearly. Closer examination of pre-war negotiations reveals the extent of those errors and their impact on creating the conditions for a military confrontation in Korea.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PRELUDE TO INVASION**

For some time, Historians generally held the Soviet Union responsible for the Korean Conflict. However, facts now reveal that responsibility for initiating the hostilities lies with Kim Il Sung and the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. It is true that the USSR and Communist China contributed to the conflict with their agreement to support the NKPA's assault on South Korea, but, at most, they were only accomplices. However, while the Soviet Union took measures to ensure that it would not become entangled in the conflict, the Chinese fell prey to their misperception of events. Mao Zedong grossly underestimated the American commitment to contain Communist aggression while exaggerating both the abilities of the NKPA and the commitment of the Soviet Union to provide assistance in the event of an extended conflict. China's errors would result in economic stagnation and political isolation from the West, as it found itself bogged down in an extended war of attrition with the United States.

Kim Il Sung initially broached the topic of NKPA military action against South Korea to Stalin during a meeting on March 7, 1949. "We believe that the situation makes it necessary and possible to liberate the country through military means," he told the Soviet dictator. At this time, just as he would for the next six months, Stalin declined to sanction military action by citing the weakness of the NKPA and the USSR-US agreement, which divided Korea at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Stalin further clarified that the Soviet Union would aid North Korea only if it were the victim of foreign aggression. Kim suffered Soviet refusal once again before Stalin ordered further study of the question.

However, this too elicited a negative response on the grounds that the NKPA was unready and that North Korea had failed to cultivate sufficient Communist popular support in the

south.<sup>41</sup> Finally, on January 30, 1950, Stalin agreed to meet with Kim Il Sung to discuss Soviet support for a NKPA invasion.<sup>42</sup>

What was it that caused Stalin to suddenly change his mind and agree to support the NKPA? It is possible that Stalin had initially feared American intervention could develop into a nuclear confrontation. When the Soviets proved their own nuclear capability in September 1949, this threat was diminished. Although the Soviet arsenal of atomic weapons must have been tiny at this point in time, it still constituted a viable counter threat. Additionally, Stalin must have been aware that the United States' nuclear arsenal was extremely limited. Soviet spies, most notably Donald Maclean, would surely have passed on to the USSR the fact that the United States could claim only thirty assembled nuclear weapons by March 1948.<sup>43</sup> NATO force deficiencies and its developing reliance on nuclear weapons to maintain the balance of power in Western Europe combined with Soviet possession of the atomic bomb would surely have precluded American commitment of those weapons in any conflict in Korea.

The nuclear threat being relatively equal, confrontation, should it occur, would rely on conventional forces. As the Soviet Union (and the PRC) enjoyed a marked numerical superiority in this arena, Stalin probably felt renewed confidence in his ability to aggressively engage the U.S. diplomatically. However, Stalin was still aware that American intervention in a Korean conflict could develop in to a direct U.S.-USSR confrontation. This was something, which neither side desired as it could, in turn lead to all-out nuclear war. Thus, in December 1949 Stalin made two facts clear to Kim. Stalin did not feel Korea was of sufficient strategic importance to warrant a conflict with the United States and the Soviet Union had no intention of

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<sup>41</sup> Evgueni Bajanov, "Assessing the Politics of the Korean War, 1949-51," pp. 54, 87.

<sup>42</sup> USSR Ambassador Shtykov to Joseph Stalin, 31 January 1950, in Kathryn Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 36. See also Bajanov, "Assessing the Politics of the Korean War," p. 87.

<sup>43</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 85-86.

allowing itself to become entangled should the United States intervene.<sup>44</sup> Having made his position clear, Stalin gave his support to Kim and the NKPA.

An additional factor, which could have influenced Stalin's decision, is that he desperately needed a "victory" with which he could counter Communist political reversals in Europe. Allied defeat of the Soviet blockade of Berlin, the creation of NATO, and the establishment of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Allied western zone of occupation had caused the Soviets considerable loss of prestige. Kim Il Sung's tenacious pursuit of Soviet assistance and his optimistic predictions for success would have provided Stalin the opportunity to counter political setbacks in Europe with a Communist victory in Korea. Indeed, Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov claims that Stalin's acquiescence was the result of Kim's prediction that the war would last only three days. Kim further claimed 200,000 party members and Communist guerrilla forces operating in the southern provinces of South Korea would provide additional support. Stalin agreed that he would meet again with Kim in April 1950 to begin planning logistical support for the NKPA, but stated that the final Soviet decision would be contingent on Mao's approval of the invasion.

Kim Il Sung traveled to Beijing in mid-May for talks with Mao Zedong. When Kim informed Mao of his intention to reunify Korea by force, Mao objected to the timing of Kim's proposed action and attempted to dissuade him from conducting operations until the Chinese had concluded their civil war. But Mao was unable to cite a valid reason for withholding Chinese support.<sup>45</sup> Since the Communist Chinese were currently engaged in actively reunifying China, it was impossible to deny the same opportunity to North Korea. This was a fact known to the North Koreans and they used it to secure Mao's approval.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 138-139, 142-144.

<sup>45</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>46</sup> Shtykov to Vyshinsky, 19 January 1950, Kathryn Weathersby, "Korea, 1949-50, To Attack, or not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung, and the Prelude to War," p. 8.



Several factors influenced Mao's decision. Support of North Korea would demonstrate China's loyalty to communism and favorably influence relations with the Soviet Union. This, in turn, would probably give the PRC access to the acquisition of Soviet military equipment and training, which it sorely needed. Communist China's disastrous attempts to capture the Nationalist-held islands of Matsu and Quemoy had made it brutally clear that the CCF's lack of air and sea power would have to be rectified if it was to subjugate Taiwan.

The projected action in Korea also held out the prospect of an increase in China's international prestige at little or no cost to the Chinese. Support of North Korea would bolster China's appeal as the Asian model for budding revolutionary states to emulate. If the NKPA's assault could achieve a lightning-fast victory over the ROKA, China stood to gain without actually having to commit troops to the conflict. Additionally, such a victory would ensure that the Communist maintained control of the Korean peninsula. Such control would guarantee the security of China's industrial basin in Manchuria.

Mao dismissed the significance of possible American intervention. "As regards the Americans, there is no need to be afraid of them," he remarked to Kim in May 1950. "The Americans will not enter a third world war for such a small territory."<sup>47</sup> Should the United States choose to intervene, Mao believed it would be impotent to affect the outcome of what promised to be a quick conquest of the Republic of Korea by the NKPA. Mao seems to have had little doubt that the Americans would be unable to react quickly enough to prevent the collapse of the ROKA. In effect, the United States would be presented with a *fait accompli*.

Mao knew that Communist China's military and economic situation mediated against prolonged involvement in a Korean conflict. On December 16, 1949, Mao acknowledged to Stalin, "China needs a period of 3-5 years . . . to bring the economy back to pre-war levels and to stabilize the country in general." He added, "Chinese forces are inadequate to effectively fight

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<sup>47</sup> Shtykov to Vyshinsky, 12 May 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," pp. 38-39.

against imperialist aggression.”<sup>48</sup> China’s economy was in shambles following the civil war. Communist forces were still engaged in pacifying large parts of the mainland and attempting to neutralize approximately 400,000 Nationalist guerrillas. Mao was acutely aware of his nation’s shortcomings, yet was still willing to support North Korea. This would seem to indicate that Mao believed the commitment of Chinese forces would be for a limited duration, if it was required at all.

In light of these facts, it seems highly improbable that Communist China would commit itself to a venture that would require an extended, large-scale commitment of Chinese military forces. Perhaps the Chinese believed the NKPA was capable of completing its conquest without assistance, or that only minimal CCF troop commitments would be required. However, should China be drawn into a prolonged conflict, it could rest secure in the knowledge that the recently completed Sino-Soviet Treaty would guarantee Soviet assistance.

Facts also indicate that, contrary to Mao’s claims, China was aware of Soviet-North Korean plans for the invasion of the ROK. Proof of Mao’s knowledge lies in the circumstances surrounding the transfer of 23,000 Chinese troops of Korean descent, along with all of their equipment, to North Korea. On January 19, 1950, Kim requested that China return 14,000 of these troops and their equipment. Not only did China comply, but it also promised to send food aid and to transfer an army closer to the border in case of *Japanese* intervention.<sup>49</sup> On January 19 Kim initiated the formal request and submitted it to China. The request was approved on January 22.<sup>50</sup> According to Nie Rongzhen (Acting Chief of Staff and Army Marshal), he

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<sup>48</sup> Record of Conversation between Stalin and Mao Zedong, 16 December 1949, “Stalin’s Conversations with Chinese Leaders,” p.5.

<sup>49</sup> Weathersby, “New Findings on the Korean War,” pp. 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> Jian, “The Sino-Soviet Alliance,” p. 24.

completed the transfer of these troops and their equipment “in accordance with the instructions from the leading members of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Central Committee.”<sup>51</sup>

Mao was the *de facto* power in the CCP. Therefore, it would not be possible for the CCP to approve this transfer or offer the additional assistance promised above without Mao’s direct knowledge or concurrence. The unusual speed associated with the CCP’s consideration and approval of the request also lends credence to the belief that Mao was aware of the intended purpose of the transfer. It is possible he sought to expedite matters in order to assist the NKPA in the integration of these troops. Whatever the reasons, it is clear Mao had chosen to support North Korea in its efforts at reunification.

Examination of events indicates that, contrary to United States’ belief, the Soviet Union did not instigate the conflict in Korea. Rather, it would seem Kim Il Sung was the chief proponent and, through constant pressure and political maneuver, succeeded in gaining the support of both the Soviet Union and Communist China. But while Stalin had bluntly informed Kim that the USSR would not become entangled militarily,<sup>52</sup> Mao left the commitment of Chinese troops open to question. It is here that the United States’ inability to convey its level of determination to contain communism made its impact felt by leading Mao to believe it would not commit troops in defense of a strategically unimportant location such as Korea.

Just as Mao had underestimated the Americans, so, too, did he exaggerate the Soviet commitment to provide support in the event of an extended conflict. Mao drew comfort from the Sino-Soviet Treaty and its assurance of mutual assistance. What Mao failed to heed was the fact that this treaty contained no specifics on just what sort of military assistance would be provided or, more importantly, whether the recipient thus assumed an obligation to pay for this

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<sup>51</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao’s Generals Remember*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>52</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 138.

assistance.<sup>53</sup> Stalin had already made it clear that he would not commit ground troops to the invasion of South Korea. In light of this fact, Mao's failure to clarify the treaty's stipulations ensured that the PRC would bear the brunt of the war effort through its compulsion to provide ground forces. It also ensured that the requirement to buy arms and ammunition would delay China's economic development.

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<sup>53</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NORTH KOREAN PEOPLE'S ARMY STRIKES



From: *Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951*  
Center of Military History, 1990  
By Billy C. Mossman

At 4:40 a.m. on June 25, 1950 the NKPA began its assault on the Republic of Korea.<sup>54</sup> The ROKA fought valiantly, but in vain, hampered by inherent deficiencies. NKPA forces seized Seoul, the South Korean capital, on June 29<sup>th</sup>. The United States' decision on June 27<sup>th</sup> to intervene came as a shock to the Communists. Both the level and speed of Washington's commitment gave Mao cause for concern. Chinese caution ensured that preparations for possible

<sup>54</sup> Shtykov to Zakharov, 26 June 1950, in Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 39.

American intervention were already underway, but events now forced Mao to accelerate their implementation. While the NKPA offensive ground to a halt at the Naktong River, Mao pushed his commanders with increasing anxiety. Chinese intervention, however, arrived too late. General MacArthur's amphibious landing of UNC forces at Inchon effectively ended Mao's hopes to use the combined forces of the NKPA and the CCF to secure the peninsula before the United States could commit its forces in strength.

The requirement to prevent South Korean aggression against North Korea had guided the United States in developing the ROKA. U.S. Ambassador John Muccio best summed up the dilemma facing the United States. "Given that Rhee and Kim were no different in their desire to unite their country militarily, the United States had no choice but to provide South Korea only limited arms and equipment," he said. "Had the South acquired the ability to invade the North, they would have done so without hesitation."<sup>55</sup> Niles Bond supports this view by adding "if Syngman Rhee had had more equipment, it's entirely possible that he would have used it himself against the North Koreans."<sup>56</sup> The result was limited American aid in terms of equipment, maintenance and training.

By June 1950, only 25 percent of the ROKA had completed battalion-level training, 35 percent of its weapons were unserviceable due to lack of spare parts and 10 to 15 percent of these weapons were completely unusable. The United States had refused to supply tanks or combat aircraft. Additionally, it provided artillery, anti-tank weapons and mines in insufficient quantities for the task now facing the ROKA.<sup>57</sup> Despite these deficiencies, the ROKA made a valiant, if futile, effort to repel the invaders. By the evening of June 26, 1950, Soviet advisors

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<sup>55</sup> McKinzie, Oral interview of John J. Muccio.

<sup>56</sup> McKinzie, Oral interview of Niles W. Bond.

<sup>57</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 13.

acknowledged that, contrary to their expectations, there had been no mass surrenders of ROKA units.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the United States claimed that not a single ROKA unit had defected to the NKPA.<sup>59</sup>

The NKPA boasted an overwhelming superiority not only in the number of front-line combat personnel, but also in numbers and quality of combat equipment. NKPA forces contained between 125 and 258 Soviet T-34 tanks, assigned to the 105<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigade, and 1600 artillery pieces.<sup>60</sup> The North Korean Air Force commanded 178 combat aircraft. Additionally, the North Koreans had several detachments of coastal naval vessels, one of which seized the port city of Urutsyn via amphibious assault on June 25. Official Soviet estimates claim that the NKPA had 2 to 1 superiority in personnel and artillery over the ROKA. In armored forces this ratio was 6.5 to 1 and in combat aircraft it was 6 to 1.

The NKPA also had its own problems. On June 26, Soviet advisors reported that the NKPA headquarters had lost communications with all of its divisions on the first day of combat and, as a result, the NKPA operated without direct guidance. These advisors also noted that the command staff, lacking adequate combat experience, failed to employ armor and artillery effectively.<sup>61</sup> These flaws would soon prove fatal for the NKPA.

The United States' initial reaction to the outbreak of hostilities was surprise, although prior to hostilities, the U.S. KMAC had analyzed NKPA deployments correctly as preparatory to war and had reported these findings.<sup>62</sup> Despite the shock, the United States reacted quickly. On June 27, 1950, President Truman ordered United States air and naval forces to support the ROKA in its defensive efforts. Truman also acted to contain the war by ordering the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Shtykov to Zakharov, 26 June 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> McKinzie, Oral interview of John J. Muccio.

<sup>60</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 147. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Shtykov to Zakharov, 26 June 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 40 and Weathersby, "New Findings on the Korean War", p. 16

<sup>62</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 27.

Fleet into the Taiwan Straits. This was a preemptive move according to Congressman Walter Judd. Its purpose was “to . . . prevent any military action across the Formosan [Taiwan] Straits,” he said. “The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet would prevent Red China from attacking Taiwan and called upon the government of free China . . . not to take any action against the mainland.”<sup>63</sup> This was followed by the United States’ commitment of ground forces to the conflict on June 30.

The United States did not arrive at the decision to intervene without heated debate. Many government officials believed that the United States should stay out of the conflict. General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognized the requirement to stand up to Soviet aggression, but led the faction opposed to American intervention, citing the lack of American interests in Korea and the need to maintain adequate force levels in Western Europe.<sup>64</sup> American intervention would be based in part on NSC-68, the United States’ policy of containing Communist expansion. A more practical view was spelled out in a document studied by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee produced the report on June 29, 1950. “The capitulation of South Korea to North Korea is unacceptable to the United States,” it stated. “[O]ur nation cannot afford the resultant loss of prestige and leadership, together with the inevitable defection of certain minor and possibly certain major powers now allied with the United States, not only in Asia but throughout the world.”<sup>65</sup> In short, the United States’ decision to intervene was based not on any particular sense of South Korea’s strategic or geographical value. Rather, it was based on the requirement for the United States to retain its credibility, the loss of which could well have served to undermine the fledgling alliance of NATO in Western Europe.

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<sup>63</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum to Commander in Chief, Far East, 27 June 1950, p. 1. See also Truman, *Memoirs*, pp. 338-339 and Jerry N. Hess, Oral interview of Walter H. Judd, 13 April 1970, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/judd.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 185-206. See also McKinzie, Oral interview of Niles W. Bond.

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1776/8, 29 June 1950, Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee on United States Course of Action in Korea, p. 48.



In a surprising turn of events, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) voted to assist South Korea and the United States in their defensive efforts. Neither the Soviet Union nor China had counted on UN intervention. They probably assumed the USSR would exercise its UNSC veto right, thereby precluding the UN commitment of forces. For whatever reason, the Soviet Ambassador to the UN was absent when the voting occurred and failed to veto UN action. On July 7, 1950, General MacArthur assumed command of UN forces in Korea.<sup>66</sup> As Syngman Rhee had already given command of South Korean forces, including paramilitary, police and youth corps units, to General MacArthur, this left him as the Supreme Allied Commander in Korea.<sup>67</sup>

The directive sent by the Joint Chiefs to MacArthur was simple: his mission was “to provide fullest possible support to South Korean forces and to clear South Korea of North Korean forces.” The JCS believed it crucial to reinforce General MacArthur “as a matter of urgency” and wanted him to “drive the North Koreans north of latitude 38 degrees North.”<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that at this point in time, the United States was restricting its operations to the area south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

U. S. military forces engaged the NKPA on July 4, 1950 with shocking results. The U.S. Army’s inexperience, outdated equipment, and piecemeal commitment to battle resulted in a decisive victory for the NKPA. Over the next two months, the United States conducted a fighting withdrawal for approximately 150 miles.<sup>69</sup> This debacle was the result of President Truman’s efforts to reduce the size of American military forces following World War II. Indeed, the U.S. military’s battlefield performance came as no surprise to informed government officials. “There is no question in my mind,” Karl Bendetsen, Assistant Secretary of the Army (1950-52)

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<sup>66</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Hess, Oral interview of John J. Muccio.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1924/20, 14 July 1950, Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee on Estimate of the Military Situation in Light of Events in Korea, pp. 351-352 and USJCS, 1776/8, p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 56 and Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 3.

recalled, “that the military forces of the United States were entirely inadequate to deal with any actual emergency entailing operations of any significant degree.” He adds that downsizing had reduced ground force infantry regiments to four infantry companies, as opposed to the standard nine, and that artillery battalions consisted of only two batteries instead of three.<sup>70</sup> The resulting performance of the Army caused the United States to examine other avenues for augmenting its forces while they corrected these deficiencies.

As early as July 14, 1950, the United States examined the feasibility of employing atomic weapons in Korea. In assessing the possibility of either Soviet or Communist Chinese intervention on behalf of the NKPA, the United States determined that atomic weapons would be of no use. The dearth of military targets, and a concomitant need to strike industrial (civilian) centers, led the United States to conclude that such “terror attacks” would have a significantly negative impact on world opinion.<sup>71</sup> This would be even more pronounced if the U.S. used these weapons against the unassisted NKPA forces. Frank Pace Jr., the Secretary of the Army (1950-53), thought that the use of atomic weapons in Korea was impractical as NATO was seeking to base its defensive posture in Western Europe on the implied threat of American nuclear retaliation against a Soviet invasion. Should the United States use atomic weapons in Korea and should they prove ineffective, NATO’s defense of Western Europe would be exposed as ineffective.<sup>72</sup> In light of these assessments, the United States decided to continue its efforts using the conventional forces at hand.

During this time, the Communist Chinese were also examining contingencies, should events force them to intervene. Immediately following the outbreak of hostilities, the Chinese recognized the requirement for an on-sight assessment of ongoing operations. To this end, on

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<sup>70</sup> Hess, Oral interview of Karl R. Bendetsen.

<sup>71</sup> USJCS, 1924/20, enclosure “B”, p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> Jerry N. Hess, Oral interview of Frank Pace Jr., 26 June 1972, document located at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/orallhist/pacefj5.htm>.

June 30, 1950 they dispatched Chai Chengwen, Director of Military Intelligence for the Southwestern Military District, and five other officers on an intelligence-gathering mission. This group was ostensibly assigned to the Chinese embassy in North Korea and had the mission of analyzing the conditions and requirements for Chinese intervention. The move was made to counter what the Chinese perceived as American-led aggression. That perception, in turn, was based on American intervention in Korea and its interdiction of the Taiwan Straits, which China considered foreign interference in its internal affairs.<sup>73</sup>

Initial Chinese planning began on July 7, 1950 with Zhou Enlai's receipt of a message from Stalin stating that the Soviets "consider it correct to concentrate immediately nine Chinese divisions on the Chinese-Korean border for volunteer actions in North Korea in case the enemy crosses the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel." Coming less than two weeks after the start of the invasion, this was a clear indicator of Stalin's lack of faith in the NKPA. Mao concurred in the requirement to provide a deterrent to a UNC advance to the Yalu River and opted to establish the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA) in Manchuria on July 7. The Chinese did not inform the Soviets of their compliance with the USSR recommendation until after July 13.<sup>74</sup>

According to Mao's orders, the CCF was to concentrate the Chinese 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Armies in Manchuria.<sup>75</sup> These forces were among the best in the CCF.<sup>76</sup> NEBDA had a total manpower strength of 260,000 soldiers. In addition to four infantry armies (twelve infantry divisions), NEBDA contained three artillery divisions, three anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) regiments, one tank regiment, one engineer regiment, three truck transportation regiments, one defense artillery regiment and one cavalry regiment.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 71-72 and Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> Stalin to Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, 5 July 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," pp. 31, 43.

<sup>75</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Xiabing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62. See also Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 59 and Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 73.

The Chinese were well aware that such a large-scale redeployment of forces could serve as an indicator of possible intervention. As such, they attempted to conceal the actual size of their mass relocation of troops. The movement of Chinese units did not escape American attention, but United States intelligence analysts quickly dismissed it as the return of Manchurian based units to their original garrisons following the end of the Chinese Civil War.<sup>78</sup>

In August 1950, as the NKPA offensive slowed to a halt, Mao became increasingly aware that the UNC, if allowed a respite, would be able to project more forces into Korea. As such, the requirement for the quick expulsion of the remaining UNC forces from the Korean Peninsula became critical. Mao also began to realize that only direct Chinese intervention might be sufficient to accomplish this task. Mao made this clear on August 4, 1950 at a meeting of the CCP and succeeded in provoking extensive debate on the state of the CCF. The next day he ordered that the NEBDA be prepared to conduct offensive operations in Korea by the end of September.<sup>79</sup> It seems likely that Mao was attempting to avoid a protracted conflict by committing Chinese forces to Korea before UNC forces could establish a tenable defense, thereby pre-empting any UNC offensive action.

The UNC amphibious assault on Inchon on September 15, 1950 signaled the end of Mao's hopes. The NKPA, which had continued its relentless assaults against the UNC's defensive line, the "Pusan Perimeter," had ignored Soviet and Chinese warnings of a possible UNC amphibious assault.<sup>80</sup> North Korea's refusal to initiate any precautionary measures against such a possibility now left the bulk of the NKPA exposed to the threat of envelopment. On September 18, Stalin had recommended the redeployment of the NKPA to meet the threat, which the UNC landing created, but Kim would not comply until September 25.<sup>81</sup> By that time, it was

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<sup>78</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 112.

<sup>79</sup> Jian, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance*, p. 26.

<sup>80</sup> Bajanov, "Assessing the Politics of the Korean War," pp. 88-89.

<sup>81</sup> Zakharov to Stalin, 26 September 1950, Mansurov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 110.

too late. UNC forces encircled and destroyed the NKPA's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies, annihilating almost fourteen North Korean divisions and recapturing Seoul. The route to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel lay undefended before the UNC forces.<sup>82</sup>

By September 29, only two weeks after the assault on Inchon, North Korean officials acknowledged that the NKPA had begun to disintegrate and that it was able to offer only negligible resistance to advancing enemy forces.<sup>83</sup> While the Chinese hurried to ready their forces, the Soviets reacted with increased tactical guidance to the remaining NKPA elements. They also began to distance themselves from the conflict by recalling Soviet advisors from Korea and exerting increased pressure on the Chinese to commit troops.<sup>84</sup> On October 1, Stalin officially requested Chinese intervention into the Korean War.<sup>85</sup> The time had come for China to decide.

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<sup>82</sup> Shtykov to Stalin, 29 September 1950, Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 111.

<sup>83</sup> Kim Il Sung and Pak Hon-Yong to Stalin, 29 September 1950, Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 112.

<sup>84</sup> Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 88.

<sup>85</sup> Stalin to Mao and Zhou Enlai, 1 October 1950, Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 114.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CHINESE DECISION TO INTERVENE

China had been willing to intervene in the Korean War prior to the UNC landing at Inchon but the Chinese Military had been unable to complete its preparations. The Central Military Commission's (CMC) August 5, 1950 message, requesting that NEBDA be prepared to conduct offensive operations in Korea by early September,<sup>86</sup> and the ongoing battle planning of NEBDA commanders<sup>87</sup> clearly illustrate Mao's readiness to commit his forces. But Mao had based his plans on a joint venture with the NKPA. Its imminent collapse now caused him to reevaluate the conditions under which Chinese troops would be required to face the UNC. As UNC advance elements crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, Mao examined the military forces involved. He also contemplated the limits of Soviet support and the increasing threat to Chinese national security.

By late September 1950, Mao had begun to realize only immediate intervention by Chinese forces in Manchuria (NEBDA) would prevent the total collapse of North Korea's efforts at reunification. Neither the PRC nor the USSR was sure how far UNC forces would advance while attempting to liberate South Korea.<sup>88</sup> The question relevant to Chinese preparations was whether the UNC would cross north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. If the UNC confined its operations to South Korea, then the NKPA would have time to regain its equilibrium. NKPA and Chinese forces could establish a defensive line along the old border and resume offensive operations at their leisure. A UNC attack into North Korea would pose a more prominent threat to China's national security.

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<sup>86</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 62.

<sup>87</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>88</sup> Shtykov to Stalin, 29 September 1950, Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 111.

It is fairly clear that, with the exception of General MacArthur, the United States had no desire to provoke a conflict with Red China. However, the Chinese perception of America's intent was quite different. On January 5, 1950, President Truman had stated that the United States had no desire to interfere in China's internal affairs. Yet following the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, one of the United States' first actions had been to dispatch the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> fleet to prevent any military operations in the Formosan Straits. To the Chinese, this action, executed under the guise of localizing the ongoing conflict in Korea, was a direct and blatant American assault on their national sovereignty and was equivalent to a United States' declaration of war.

The presence of UNC troops on the Chinese-Korean border would pose a dire threat to China and to Manchuria in particular. Mao believed if he allowed the UNC to establish a permanent presence on the border, then the United States would eventually arrange an "incident" as pretext for an invasion. Nor was this belief restricted to Mao. Many Chinese government officials and subordinate level commanders in the CCF shared his opinion.<sup>89</sup>

Chiang Kai-shek's offer of 30,000 Nationalist Chinese troops for use by the UNC in Korea further exacerbated Chinese suspicions of American aggression. General MacArthur's actions and statements added to the plausibility that the U. S. might use Nationalist troops. MacArthur personally conducted an "inspection trip" to Taiwan early in the summer of 1950. General MacArthur's and Chiang Kai-shek's statements on the determination of the United States and Taiwan to combat communism in Asia created, in Mao's view, the illusion of a joint conspiracy against the People's Republic of China.<sup>90</sup> Mao believed these events served to underscore the inevitability of a military confrontation between the United States and the PRC.

Mao probably harbored a personal dislike and mistrust of the Soviet Union and Stalin in particular, based on past differences of opinion. However, unlike the United States, the Soviet

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<sup>89</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's General's Remember*, pp. 62-63 and Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 56.

<sup>90</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 79-80.

Union and China were both Communist regimes and should therefore work together. The United States had demonstrated its lack of tolerance for both revolutionary and Communist movements. In the Philippines, American forces were engaged in eliminating the Hukabalahop rebels. In French Indochina, the United States provided support to French forces battling Communist-backed rebels. Mao's official recognition of North Vietnam's Communist government on January 17, 1950 did nothing to promote better diplomatic relations with the United States.<sup>91</sup> As China was both a revolutionary movement and a Communist government, it found itself at growing odds with the United States.

The strain in diplomatic relations between the PRC and the U. S. originated during World War II. It began with President Roosevelt's refusal to meet with Mao in 1944. This was followed by the U.S. Army's withdrawal of its Dixie Mission advisory members from Communist units, though American advisors remained with the Nationalist forces. In 1945, following the collapse of the Japanese Army, U.S. Army units seized Tsingtao, Tientsin and Chingwantao to prevent their occupation by Communist forces.<sup>92</sup> The United States showed its preference for the nationalist forces by providing them equipment, supplies and transport throughout most of their battle against the Communists during the Chinese Civil War.

Matters continued to deteriorate between 1945 and 1950. In November 1948, the Communist Chinese government tried, convicted and expelled U.S. Consul Angus Ward for espionage. On August 5, 1949, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made reference to Communist China's subservience to the Soviet Union in somewhat harsh tones. China perceived it as an indirect threat, eliciting Mao to respond that the United States was China's most dangerous enemy.<sup>93</sup> There was also the ongoing dispute over the United Nations' recognition of the

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<sup>91</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 251.

<sup>92</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.



Chinese Nationalist government. The United States proposed the measure for recognition but deliberately refused the same recognition for the Chinese Communist government. This was a major source of contention to the PRC and elicited heated complaints.<sup>94</sup> Chinese anti-American rhetoric reached its boiling point in 1950, when, on June 28, Mao Zedong addressed the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Central People's Government Council. In this speech, Mao reacted strongly to the presence of the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the Formosan Straits and called for all nations to unite against American imperialism.<sup>95</sup>

Mao recognized three possible locations for a confrontation with the United States. The first of these was Taiwan. Communist Chinese military actions in this region had already demonstrated the CCF's deficiency in naval and air power. Given the overwhelming American superiority in these two areas, a confrontation in Taiwan would be a disaster for Chinese arms. The second choice was Vietnam, but extended supply lines, required for the support of the CCF, precluded its acceptance as a likely area for confrontation. In the end, it was the United States who chose the battleground. The presence of the U.S. Army in Korea was an open invitation to Mao for confrontation in that it offered China relatively short lines of communication and supply. Moreover, the U.S. Army was already engaged against a Chinese ally, granting a pretext for Chinese intervention. Mao had only to decide what forces to commit.

The CCF had ballooned into a massive organization between the end of World War II and the withdrawal of the remaining Nationalist forces to Taiwan in 1949. The CCF's absorption of defecting Nationalist units had contributed a large amount of manpower and a limited number of trained specialists but equipment and training of individual units varied greatly. The CCF was a force in dire need of reorganization, re-equipping and modernization. As of July 15, 1950, the CCF contained approximately 5,138,756 soldiers comprising over 250

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<sup>94</sup> Mao Zedong to Lui Shaoqi, 18 January 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 252-253.

<sup>95</sup> Speech by Mao Zedong at the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Central People's Government Council, 28 June 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 270.

divisions. The bulk of these divisions constituted four CCF field armies and two army groups. The Chinese command considered only half of these forces to be combat effective.<sup>96</sup>

Though the four field armies were at full strength, the quality of troops and the number of assigned divisions differed greatly from field army to field army. The Chinese 1<sup>st</sup> Field Army, located in northwestern China, contained thirty-four divisions and was engaged in pacifying the province of Xinjiang. The Chinese 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Army, located in western China, contained forty-nine divisions and was preparing to invade Tibet. The Chinese 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Army, with seventy-two divisions, was on China's east coast preparing to invade Taiwan. The Chinese 4<sup>th</sup> Field Army was operating with its fifty-nine divisions along the southern coast of China and was engaged in reducing Nationalist guerrilla forces. There were also thirty-nine divisions stationed in northern China, which constituted a strategic reserve. Additionally, the Chinese 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group (nine divisions) was located at Zhengzhou in the Henan province and the Chinese 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group (nine divisions) was garrisoned near Shanghai. These army groups acted as strategic reserve and reserve for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Army. Approximately 2.6 million soldiers augmented these units, serving in local defense units and construction corps.<sup>97</sup>

On July 13, 1950, Mao and the CMC officially designated the initial forces that would belong to NEBDA. These consisted of the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Armies (13<sup>th</sup> Army Group) along with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Army (4<sup>th</sup> Field Army). This created an initial force of twelve infantry divisions, which, along with supporting units, totaled almost 250,000 troops. NEBDA would exceed 260,000 combat troops before the Chinese would rename it the Chinese People's Volunteer Force (CPVF) and commit it to combat in Korea. By the end of July, all of these units had completed their move to northeastern China.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 41, 72.

<sup>97</sup> Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 64 see also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>98</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 58-59.

With American military forces openly supporting South Korea, Mao and the CMC realized that overt Chinese intervention would almost certainly result in escalation to general war, should the joint efforts of the CCF and NKPA prove incapable of quickly overrunning the Korean peninsula. To this end, it was decided that Chinese forces would enter Korea as “volunteers”, without the official support of the People’s Republic of China. Despite this, the threat of a general confrontation with the United States remained and the Chinese had to plan for this contingency.<sup>99</sup>

The possibility of American sponsored attacks on Chinese territory led the CMC to designate the 9<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Army Groups, containing twelve and nine divisions respectively, as China’s northeastern strategic reserve. These units were to provide protection against attacks on China’s coastal regions while retaining China’s ability to counter a possible French thrust from Indochina or a Nationalist assault from Taiwan. By late August 1950, events would force Mao to also designate them for inclusion in the CPVF. On September 6, 1950, the 50<sup>th</sup> Army would move to Manchuria to assume border security duties.<sup>100</sup>

Communist China boasted an extremely large military, but appearances were deceptive. The Chinese Civil War had left the CCF under-equipped and under-trained. The CCF’s primary sources of supply for weapons during the civil war had been captured enemy stockpiles. As a result, the CCF now found itself armed with a mixed assortment of American and Japanese equipment. This made it almost impossible for the Chinese to establish supply operations based on a standardized organization. Chinese army units found it necessary to swap weapons to achieve internal (unit) standardization. The Chinese 38<sup>th</sup> Army’s trade of its American weapons

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<sup>99</sup> Mao to Stalin, 2 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>100</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao’s Generals Remember*, p. 113 and Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 84-85.

for the 40<sup>th</sup> Army's Japanese weapons illustrates how common this action was and at what levels it occurred.<sup>101</sup>

Lack of adequate training also took its toll on the CCF's combat readiness. The CCF could claim ownership of 410 aging Japanese and American armored fighting vehicles by May 1950. However, these tanks were scattered in small groups among the field armies, which precluded the CCF from effectively employing them as a decisive combat multiplier. Furthermore, as late as August 1950, Xu Guangda, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps Commander, claimed that none of these units was operational due to lack of training.<sup>102</sup>

Adding to these problems were shortages of ammunition and basic equipment. Communist China was unable to produce sufficient amounts of ammunition to supply its forces. Indeed, China could produce only a few thousand tons per year compared to the United States' ability to produce a million tons annually. Marshal Nie Rongzhen cited that China could only produce 1,500 tons of the CPVF's required 14,100 tons of ammunition. Exacerbating this problem were critical shortages in anti-tank weaponry, surface-to-air communications equipment, and trucks for both transportation and supply.<sup>103</sup>

While the CCF could claim a large number of combat soldiers, it suffered from a severe shortage of specialists among its personnel. Prior to its commitment to combat in Korea, the CPVF support services required approximately 1,000 truck drivers and medical personnel. Hong Xuezhi, Director of CPVF Logistics, claimed that, at the time of its establishment, the CPVF Logistics Department "had a shortage of 1,560 managing officers, about 54 percent of its full strength."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 13, 58, 64.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 130-131.

The Soviet Union was able to alleviate some of these deficiencies for China. Stalin proved more than willing, for a price, to supply China with equipment, ammunition and training. On July 27, 1950, Stalin initially addressed the matter of aid to China in a meeting with the Soviet Politburo.<sup>105</sup> Although Stalin approved of aid to China, the Soviet Union would be unable to deliver the majority of that aid until after the CCF had intervened in Korea. Even then, a large part of the equipment, which the Soviet Union would provide was 1930 vintage and not on par with American equipment. However, it was still better than what the Chinese currently owned.

Soviet deliveries began with the shipment of long-range artillery pieces. The Chinese eventually received 4,000 artillery pieces and associated ammunition by the end of 1950. In late August 1950, Stalin provided 122 MIG-15 fighter aircraft and training personnel to China.<sup>106</sup> Between October and December 1950, Stalin provided equipment and training to establish thirteen Chinese air regiments.<sup>107</sup> The USSR also supplied large deliveries of armored fighting vehicles in October and November 1950, including training and equipment for the creation of ten Chinese tank regiments.<sup>108</sup> By the end of the Korean War, Soviet deliveries to China had provided enough equipment for sixty-four infantry divisions and twenty-two air divisions. These air divisions received approximately 372 Soviet MIG-15 fighter aircraft. Additionally, the Soviet Union would provide 90 percent of China's wartime ammunition expenditures.<sup>109</sup>

Stalin did not confine his support of China to the delivery of equipment and training personnel. He also provided Soviet troops for use in the defense of Chinese territory. On November 3, 1950, the Soviet Union dispatched ten tank regiments to four major cities in

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<sup>105</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 70, 201.

<sup>106</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>107</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 200 and Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 84. See also Stalin to Zhou Enlai, 27 August 1950, and Mao to Stalin, 15 November 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," pp. 45, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 66.

<sup>109</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 201.

northern, eastern and northeastern China to assist in providing rear area security. Stalin would also provide sixteen Soviet air regiments to China for use in Korea, though he would stipulate severe restrictions on their operations to prevent the appearance of overt Soviet intervention in the conflict.<sup>110</sup>

Stalin's military aid to both China and North Korea illustrates his full support for the military reunification of Korea and the strengthening of Communist power in Asia. That he accomplished this by providing equipment and advisory personnel, as opposed to direct Soviet military intervention, indicates his desire to avoid provoking a confrontation with the United States. Stalin had made it clear to Kim that the Soviet Union would not be drawn into a Korean conflict prior to granting his approval of the operation. While Stalin was not afraid of the United States and believed he could win such a conflict should it occur, he did recognize that escalation to general war served the interests of neither the United States nor the Soviet Union.

Richard Thornton, in his book *Odd Man Out*, maintains that Stalin attempted to use the conflict to ensure China's subordination to the Soviet Union. Specifically, he claims that Stalin deliberately failed to supply equipment in the amounts requested by Mao. Yet, examination of China's requests reveals that the CCF's requirements were exceedingly large. On November 8, 1950, China requested 140,000 rifles with fifty-eight million rounds of ammunition, 7,000 light machine guns with thirty-seven million rounds of ammunition and 2,000 heavy machine guns with twenty million rounds of ammunition.<sup>111</sup> On November 16, China requested fuel and lubricants amounting to approximately 17,000 tons and 6,000 barrels respectively.<sup>112</sup> In light of these massive quantities and the Second World War's drain on the Soviet economy, it is easy to understand the Soviet Union's inability to match supply with demand. Simply put, the Soviet

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<sup>110</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 195, 200.

<sup>111</sup> Mao to Stalin, 8 November 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 48.

<sup>112</sup> Zhou Enlai to Stalin, 15 November 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 49.

Union was engaged in a cold war in Western Europe and could not afford to provide equipment in such quantities to both the Chinese and the North Koreans.

Mr. Thornton's claims that Stalin ensured the Chinese would enter the conflict without air cover also appear to be unfounded. Stalin initially promised that he would "try to provide air cover" for the CPVF in a message to the Chinese Foreign Minister, Zhou Enlai on July 5, 1950.<sup>113</sup> In early October, Mao directed Zhou Enlai to confirm Soviet air support prior to ordering the CPVF into Korea. On October 11, Zhou Enlai met with Stalin, who informed him that the Soviets were indeed prepared to provide the air cover. A few hours after this meeting, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov informed Zhou Enlai that this was not possible and that the Soviets would be unable to provide air cover for at least two and one half months.<sup>114</sup> Yet, a little over one month later, Stalin would provide sixteen air regiments to China for use in Northern Korea.<sup>115</sup>

The reasons for Stalin's uncharacteristic indecisiveness are the subject of much conjecture by Mr. Thornton. The explanation that seems most plausible is Stalin's insistence that the Soviet Union remain officially uninvolved in the conflict. Stalin was clearly aware of the United States' stance against Soviet expansionism, which it had demonstrated by confronting the USSR in its attempt to blockade Berlin. The U.S had also played a major role in the establishment of NATO, whose primary function was to safeguard Western Europe against Soviet expansionism. Stalin probably had no desire to further test American determination. His decision to minimize Soviet involvement would be supported by the Politburo on numerous occasions in the months prior to Chinese intervention.<sup>116</sup> In anticipation of events, the Soviet Union had acted to provide the Chinese with the necessary air cover by giving them fighter

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<sup>113</sup> Stalin to Zhou Enlai, 5 July 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 83.

<sup>115</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 195.

<sup>116</sup> Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 100.

aircraft and training Chinese pilots. Soviet air units would thus be able to protect the Chinese-Korean border, freeing up Chinese air units for operations in Korea itself.<sup>117</sup> Mao himself provided the best summary of the situation. “Past hesitations by our comrades occurred because questions about the international situation, questions about the Soviet assistance to us, and questions about air cover were not clear to them.”<sup>118</sup>

In addition to assessing the logistical shortcomings of the CCF, the Chinese also had to assess the comparative strengths and weaknesses of both their own and the American forces. In assessing the U.S. Army, the Chinese erred in the same manner, as had the Americans. Namely, their assessment of U.S. Army capabilities in 1950 was based on its operations in Normandy, Western Europe and the South Pacific during World War II. Yet, unlike the Americans, Hong Xuezhi claimed the Chinese were aware of their lack of current information. The CMC acknowledged the U.S. Army could claim superiority in modern weaponry, maneuverability and air/naval power.<sup>119</sup> These strengths would have a major impact on CPVF operations in Korea.

United States’ air superiority would result in an increased threat of U.S. Air Force strikes on CPVF logistical lines, which hampered the replacement of Chinese combat losses in equipment and personnel. The vulnerability of Chinese supply lines, and the invulnerability of American supply lines, despite their extended length, was clear to everyone except Mao. While, General Peng Dehuai, Commander CPVF, stated this clearly in a meeting of the Chinese General Staff on August 8, 1950,<sup>120</sup> Mao disagreed. Mao claimed the length of the U.S. Army’s supply lines would prove to be a burden without requiring Chinese interdiction.<sup>121</sup>

The greatest threat to CPVF operations lay in the marked firepower superiority of U.S. Army units. Chinese army commanders recognized this peril and recommended the

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<sup>117</sup> Thornton, *Odd Man Out*, p. 257.

<sup>118</sup> Roschin to Stalin, 14 October 1950, Mansourov, “China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War,” p. 118.

<sup>119</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao’s Generals Remember*, p. 115.

<sup>120</sup> Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 68.

<sup>121</sup> Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, p. 81.



strengthening of CPVF artillery assets and support services as a countermeasure.<sup>122</sup> Mao estimated a force ratio of 4:1 in favor of the Chinese was required to overcome this handicap.<sup>123</sup> In response to this, upon committing the CPVF to operations in Korea, he ordered General Peng Dehuai to direct his operations primarily against ROKA units. Despite these precautions, the Chinese expected to suffer 200,000 casualties within the first year of the war.<sup>124</sup>

By far, the most potent weapon in the United States' arsenal was the atomic bomb. That the Americans might employ the atomic bomb in the Korea War was a well-known fact in the Chinese 13<sup>th</sup> Army, whose soldiers had come to refer to the Yalu River bridges as the "gates of hell."<sup>125</sup> Mao was unperturbed by this threat. He knew that the Soviet Union's possession of the atomic bomb provided a credible counter-balance. Mao stated that several factors would preclude American employment of the atomic bomb in Korea. First of all, there was a dearth of potential targets as China was not an industrialized country and was therefore not overly susceptible to the effects of strategic bombing. Second, use of the atomic bomb would subject the United States to severe international criticism, as well as stirring up moral conflict at home. Mao averred that, while these weapons could cause great destruction to China, their use would not be decisive in influencing the outcome of the Korean War.<sup>126</sup>

The Chinese also responded by focusing their propaganda on promoting the theme of morale over technology, citing China's sustained resistance against Japan during World War II and Communist Chinese victories over the GMD. In both of these struggles China had used determination and perseverance to overcome its technological inferiority. Additionally, the United States had equipped, trained and advised the GMD. The defeat of the GMD surely

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<sup>122</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 65.

<sup>123</sup> Mao to Stalin, 2 October 1950 and Mao to Zhou Enlai, 2 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 275-276, 281-282.

<sup>124</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>125</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 85. See also Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 165.

<sup>126</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 164-166. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 63.

indicated that it was possible for Communist China to defeat the United States. Chinese leaders claimed U.S. Army units were road-bound due to their heavy mechanization and relied too heavily on air and artillery supporting fires. CCF strengths in close quarter fighting, bayonet usage, night attacks, and envelopment techniques would serve to counter the Americans' strengths. Chinese military leaders believed these strengths would ensure that battlefield initiative belonged to their soldiers.<sup>127</sup>

The stage was now set for China to enter the conflict. China had analyzed both its own forces and those of its opponents. It had taken steps to correct identified deficiencies and had utilized propaganda to ensure the spiritual commitment of its soldiers to fight. But while China was busy planning a carefully phased entry into the conflict, two events occurred, which disrupted their timetable and forced the premature commitment of the CPVF to combat. The first of these was the ROKA 3<sup>rd</sup> division's crossing of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on October 1, 1950. The second event was the UNC offensive, which would follow on October 8.

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had ordered General MacArthur to clear South Korea of North Korean forces on June 29, 1950.<sup>128</sup> The same JCS directive limited the UNC area of operations to South Korea. On September 7, the JCS recommended to the U.S. Secretary of Defense that they allow ROKA elements to operate on both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel following the destruction of the NKPA, as these operations would "probably be of a guerrilla nature."<sup>129</sup> Following presidential approval, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a new directive on September 27, 1950, authorizing General MacArthur to conduct *UNC* operations above and below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, provided neither Chinese nor Soviet forces had entered Korea. It explicitly emphasized the inviolability of the Chinese Manchurian border and further stated only South Korean units

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<sup>127</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 15, 115.

<sup>128</sup> USJCS 1776/8, p. 49. See also USJCS 1924/20.

<sup>129</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1776/96, Decision by the JCS re Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee on United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea, 7 September 1950.

would conduct operations in the northeastern provinces bordering China and the USSR.<sup>130</sup> Under the provisions of this directive, elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ROKA division crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into North Korea on October 1, 1950.

On October 7, the UN unleashed what they believed would be the *coup de grace* on North Korea. The UN General Assembly approved a British-sponsored resolution, which authorized UNC forces to occupy all of North Korea in order to hold elections and provide for national reunification following the destruction of the NKPA.<sup>131</sup> Armed with both UN and presidential approval, General MacArthur wasted no time in launching his offensive against the remnants of the NKPA. On October 7, advance elements of the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry crossed into North Korea. The rest of the Eighth Army and X Corps followed them the next day.

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<sup>130</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1776/122, Note by the Secretaries to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea, 3 October 1950, p. 578.

<sup>131</sup> Mansourov, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," p. 101.

## CHAPTER 5

### COUNTDOWN TO CONFRONTATION

Though China had hoped to be able to enter into the Korean War in early September 1950, events would conspire to delay its operations until mid-October. However, these events did not dictate the necessity of Chinese intervention. Mao had made that decision as early as August 1950. The changing situation affected China by forcing it to re-evaluate its plans prior to initiating offensive operations. While Beijing prepared for war, Washington analyzed and dismissed the possibility of active Chinese intervention. American intelligence failures and General MacArthur's personal agenda combined to ensure that the CPVF would have the advantage of complete surprise in its first encounter with U. S. troops.

Mao had initially hoped for the CPVF to enter Korea in early September, prior to the UNC landing at Inchon and the collapse of the NKPA which followed. The CMC's August 5 message to Gao Gang read, "The Frontier Force (NEBDA) . . . should prepare . . . for battle by the first 10 days of September."<sup>132</sup> As UNC forces did not land at Inchon until September 15, it is clear General MacArthur's assault did not determine whether or not China would intervene.

On August 18, Mao notified Gao Gang that he had extended the CPVF deadline for intervention to September 30.<sup>133</sup> Then, on October 2, Mao notified Stalin that the new target date for Chinese intervention was October 15.<sup>134</sup> The first UNC unit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ROKA Division, crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on October 1 and the UNC launched a full offensive on October 8. On this date, Mao officially designated NEBDA as the Chinese People's Volunteer Force<sup>135</sup> and notified Kim Il Sung of China's intention to intervene.<sup>136</sup> In light of the UNC offensive, this

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<sup>132</sup> Military Commission to Gao Gang, 5 August 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 271.

<sup>133</sup> Mao to Gao Gang, 18 August 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners* p. 272.

<sup>134</sup> Mao to Stalin, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners* pp. 275-276.

<sup>135</sup> Mao's Directive to the CPVF, 8 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 278.

<sup>136</sup> Mao to Kim Il Sung, 8 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 279.

move was probably meant to maintain North Korea's will to fight and prevent the dissolution of remaining NKPA elements.

On October 12, Mao seems to have had second thoughts about when to commit the CPVF. Contrary to Mr. Thornton's arguments, it is doubtful that Mao's "refusal to intervene" was in response to the Soviet Union's "refusal to supply air cover". Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov had informed Zhou Enlai the previous day that they would be unable to provide air cover for at least two and one half months.<sup>137</sup> Mao relayed this information to Peng Dehuai on the same day and ordered an additional anti-aircraft artillery regiment to Shenyang to join the CPVF.<sup>138</sup> Mao had already notified Kim that help was on the way and could hardly renege on this promise without suffering irreparable damage to China's credibility. While Mao did recall Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang to Beijing for consultation,<sup>139</sup> it was probably to revise battle plans rather than to discuss whether or not Beijing should intervene at all.

The CPVF's inability to complete necessary preparations prior to September 30 was the primary factor that influenced the date of China's intervention. The unexpected sudden collapse of the NKPA and the speed of the UNC advance into North Korea were contributing supplementary factors. The lack of Soviet air cover also played an important role in the Chinese decision-making process. None of the supplementary factors had an impact on whether Mao would intervene but they did establish the requirement for the CPVF to revise its plans prior to entering Korea.

Mao issued the final orders directing Chinese intervention into the Korean War on October 14, 1950.<sup>140</sup> The CPVF was to begin movement into Korea on October 19 to establish a

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<sup>137</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 83.

<sup>138</sup> Mao to Peng Dehuai, 11 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 280.

<sup>139</sup> Mao to Peng Dehuai, 12 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 281.

<sup>140</sup> Mao to Zhou Enlai, 14 October 1950, Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 282-284. See also Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 86-88.

defensive line running from Pyongyang to Wonsan. All CPVF units were to be south of the Yalu River and in their assigned defensive positions by October 28. The immediate Chinese goal was to provide a safe haven where North Korea could reconstitute its withdrawing units. At the same time, the establishment of a defensive line would minimize the requirement for the CPVF to actively engage in combat with UNC troops and allow it additional time to receive equipment and training. Additionally, the CPVF and NKPA would be able to defend Pyongyang and would retain the ability to launch a counterattack towards Wonsan, should the UNC attempt to continue its northward advance.

The Chinese had no intentions of voluntarily initiating any offensive action until such time as they were fully equipped, fully trained and had achieved a clear superiority over the enemy. Mao estimated that it could be as long as six months before the CPVF would be ready to take the offensive. Mao then intended to lure the UNC into an ambush, where the CPVF and NKPA could isolate and destroy its scattered units.<sup>141</sup> Mao continually emphasized surprise as a prerequisite for the Chinese to initiate a decisive first engagement. Though Mao's first priority was to eliminate ROKA units, he also recognized that Communist forces might have to engage U.S. Army units as well. In his opinion, the element of surprise would be instrumental in counter-acting American firepower superiority.<sup>142</sup>

The CMC quickly realized it had overestimated its logistical abilities. Only four major crossing sites existed over the Yalu River. 260,000 soldiers and their associated equipment would have to cross these bridges to enter Korea. UNC air superiority not only endangered these bridges, but also soon proved to be a serious threat to Chinese transportation units. Chinese logistical teams had moved into Korea in advance of the CPVF main units to establish supply depots. Prior to the CPVF's entry into Korea, these same teams had suffered the loss of

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<sup>141</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>142</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 93-94.

approximately 200 trucks.<sup>143</sup> Hong Xuezhi also reported the loss of another 217 trucks, almost 17 percent of the total transport available, during the first week of CPVF operations in Korea. He further stated that 184 of these trucks were lost as a result of UNC air attacks.<sup>144</sup> Such losses would soon become a common occurrence for the Chinese.

Despite the difficulties involved, CPVF forces entered Korea according to schedule. By October 20, Chinese units were in movement toward their assembly areas where they would establish defensive positions and await the arrival of the remaining NKPA elements. By this time, the NKPA retained only 2 infantry divisions, 1 tank division, 1 workers division and 1 tank regiment.<sup>145</sup> What remained was sufficient to allow North Korea to rebuild the NKPA under the protective eye of the CPVF.

Although the CPVF achieved complete surprise when it initially engaged American forces, its entry into Korea did not go completely undetected by the United States' intelligence network. As early as July 11, 1950, CINCFE had reported, "the presence of Communist Chinese forces among the North Koreans."<sup>146</sup> This was echoed in a July 14 note to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>147</sup> Both of these documents also recognized the presence of Chinese troops in North Korea as an indicator of the possibility of Chinese intervention. Despite this, the UNC operations order for the advance across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel claimed only, "some unconfirmed reports of CCF and USSR units in North Korean rear areas." General Headquarters (GHQ) UNC dismissed previous reports of Chinese troops in the battle area claiming they were "CCF trained and equipped" North Koreans and, though it acknowledged the movement of Chinese troops into Manchuria, it

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<sup>143</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 132, 147-148.

<sup>144</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>145</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>146</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1924/16, Note by the Secretaries to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Estimate of North Korean Capabilities, 11 July 1950, p. 269.

<sup>147</sup> USJCS 1924/20, p. 353.

did not consider Chinese intervention to be a credible threat.<sup>148</sup> In light of the information available to the United States, the question arises as to why it was unable to accurately predict whether the Chinese would enter the conflict.

Part of the answer lies in the anti-Communist movement, which was running rampant in the United States at the time. McCarthyism and the CCP victory in the Chinese Civil War had led to intense investigations into the careers of personnel who had accurately predicted a Communist victory. As a result, by the outbreak of war in Korea, most of the State Department's Far East regional experts had either lost their credibility or were unemployed. John Hickerson, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for UN Affairs (1949-1953) confirmed this fact. "McCarthyism . . . led pretty well to the disruption of our own excellent China service contingent in the Foreign Service, nearly all those boys had to leave," he stated.<sup>149</sup> Distrust of those with Communist leanings also led the United States to ignore vital information, which a reliable Beijing source forwarded early on October 19, 1950. The source claimed the Chinese had alerted over 400,000 border troops for entry into Korea on October 19 or 20. Washington however, received the report with skepticism, as the informant was known to be a Communist sympathizer.<sup>150</sup>

The loss of regional expertise was not limited to the State Department. The CIA also suffered from an inability not only to collect information in the Far East but also to recognize its value and to accurately assess its possible impact on United States' foreign policy. Its muddled view of China caused it to claim the Chinese would not intervene because they feared the consequences of a war with the United States. It further claimed Beijing was concerned that intervention might jeopardize its chances for UN recognition and would encourage anti-

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<sup>148</sup> General Headquarters, United Nations Command, Operations Order Number 2, 2 October 1950, Appendix 1 to Annex C, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Richard D. McKinzie, Oral interview of John D. Hickerson, 5 Jun 1973, document located at <http://trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/hickerson.htm#oh2>.

<sup>150</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 118.



Communist forces and endanger the fledgling Communist regime.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, Chinese intervention would result in an American declaration of war, which would draw in the USSR and could lead to escalation to a general war.

The CIA failed to notice that the increase in China's anti-American rhetoric made it clear that it did not fear the United States and it was not going to back down. Beijing also had no fear of endangering its recognition by the UN. The United States was already actively parrying Communist Chinese political maneuvers to acquire legitimacy through international acknowledgement of their government. Finally, Mao had no fear of an internal revolution. The CPVF was but a small portion of the CCF and China retained ample troops to continue operations against the scattered Nationalist guerilla elements that remained on the mainland. Though the United States did not recognize it, American actions had inadvertently transmitted a desire for confrontation to Beijing. To the Mao, Chinese "fears" were irrelevant in the face of such open American hostility.

Another problem was MacArthur's belief that it was the responsibility of the American government to determine whether the Chinese or the Soviets would intervene. To some extent, MacArthur was correct, as national level intelligence assets are usually able to produce a clearer picture of the overall strategic situation. However, this did not hold true in the case of American operations in the Far East. Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins estimated in 1950 that the United States derived 90 percent of its intelligence on the Far East from Far East Command sources.<sup>152</sup> As such, it was incumbent on CINCFE (General MacArthur) to focus his intelligence assets on assessing the possibility of Chinese intervention.

MacArthur later claimed that vital national level intelligence was withheld from him and, technically speaking, this could be true. The United States probably derived its intelligence on

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<sup>151</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Chinese troop movements in Manchuria from communications intelligence (COMINT) sources. Had this information come from human intelligence (HUMINT) sources, these same sources would have been able to report the CPVF's entry into Korea. General MacArthur's daily intelligence summary (DIS) bore a secret classification and would not have contained COMINT, which bears a top-secret classification. But this is where MacArthur's claims lose their validity. In his order for the UNC offensive across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, MacArthur identified approximately 100,000 Chinese troops in Manchuria, which the Chinese could commit to operations in Korea, should they so choose.<sup>153</sup> MacArthur was, therefore, clearly aware that the Chinese were massing in Manchuria. While his assessment of CPVF strength may have been incorrect, the fact remains that it constituted a viable threat to future UNC operations, which he should not have dismissed lightly. It is probably true that CINCFE did not receive raw top-secret COMINT information. It is obvious that he did receive intelligence containing sanitized summaries of this information.

In an effort to reemphasize the requirement for caution, The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff dispatched a directive to General MacArthur on September 27, 1950. This directive outlined CINCFE's options in the event of Chinese or Soviet intervention. It authorized the conduct of operations above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel so long as "there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea." The directive spelled out exactly what MacArthur's actions were to be in the event of *Soviet* intervention. Yet, in demonstration of the United States' complete disregard for the capabilities of the CCF, the directive authorized MacArthur to continue operations in the face of Chinese intervention "as long as action . . . offers a reasonable chance of successful resistance."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> GHQ, UNC OPORD 2, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>154</sup> U.S. JCS 1776/122, p. 578.

Recognizing the increasing possibility of Chinese intervention, the Joint Chiefs attempted to clarify their September 27 directive. In a directive dated October 6, 1950, General MacArthur was again authorized to continue operations “in the event of open or covert employment anywhere in Korea of major Chinese Communist units . . . as long as, in your [MacArthur’s] judgement, action . . . offers a reasonable chance of success.” The directive made it clear that MacArthur was to take no action against China itself without prior national level authorization.<sup>155</sup> Contrary to their intended purpose of delineating appropriate courses of action, these directives ensured that MacArthur would retain his freedom of action when the Chinese struck.

By mid-October, U.S. officials still failed to take the threat of Chinese intervention seriously. General MacArthur was largely responsible for this outlook. At his meeting with President Truman on Wake Island (October 15, 1950), he stated that CIA and State Department sources had detected no intent by the PRC to intervene militarily. He acknowledged the reported presence of approximately 300,000 Chinese troops in Manchuria, but claimed only 100-125,000 of these soldiers were located along the Yalu River. Of these, he claimed that only 50-60,000 would be able to conduct operations in Korea. If the Chinese intervened, UNC air strikes would render them combat-ineffective before they reached the battlefield. In his memoirs, General Omar Bradley adds that MacArthur claimed that while Chinese intervention was a “continuing possibility[,] . . . such action is not probable.”<sup>156</sup>

General MacArthur was blinded by his conviction that the Chinese would not intervene at this stage of the war and by his faith in aerial intelligence to detect any troop movements into, or out of, Korea. General Willoughby, who was responsible for producing MacArthur’s daily intelligence summary, shared this view. Willoughby was further handicapped by his outdated

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<sup>155</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1776/130, Note by the Secretaries to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea, 6 October 1950, p. 610.

<sup>156</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, p. 362 and Bradley, *A General’s Life*, pp. 570, 575.

knowledge of China and his personal disdain for the Chinese.<sup>157</sup> The Eighth Army was reporting the capture of individual Chinese prisoners by October 25,<sup>158</sup> but the UNC Command Group refused to exercise caution. The personal beliefs of MacArthur and Willoughby, in conjunction with limited intelligence information, established a common disbelief that the Chinese would intervene. Niles Bond best stated the resulting shock at China's entry into the war: "There was . . . tremendous unhappiness when the Chinese attack came across the Yalu," he said simply. "This was something Willoughby had said wouldn't happen."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Hess, Oral Interview of John J. Muccio.

<sup>158</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, p. 373.

<sup>159</sup> Mckinzie, Oral interview of Niles W. Bond.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE CHINESE 1<sup>st</sup> OFFENSIVE

While CPVF units hurriedly crossed the Korean border and moved towards their designated assembly areas, UNC troops continued their push northward. UNC forces, in demonstration of their belief that the Chinese would not intervene, advanced rapidly with total disregard for terrain effects and force dispersion. Augmented by the disintegration of the NKPA's remaining elements, UNC actions caused the Chinese to once again re-evaluate their plans. After consulting with Peng Dehuai, Mao ordered a limited offensive, which brought the UNC offensive to a temporary halt as the CPVF inflicted punishing losses on its advance elements. At this point, UNC GHQ proved unable to confirm Chinese intervention and dismissed the offensive as a last gasp attempt by the NKPA to save North Korea. As a result, when the UNC resumed its drive north, the CPVF would again take them by surprise.

The four armies of the Chinese 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group began crossing the Yalu River on October 19, 1950. The 40<sup>th</sup> Army crossed at Andong-Sinuiju and advanced towards Tokchon in central northern Korea. The 39<sup>th</sup> Army, after concentrating in the vicinity of Namsidong, proceeded towards the cities of Kusong and Taechon, near the western coast of North Korea. The 42<sup>nd</sup> Army crossed near Linjiang and moved to establish defensive positions near Oro-ri, on the eastern coast of North Korea. The 38<sup>th</sup> Army established an assembly area just inside Korea near Kanggye, where it would assume duties as army group reserve. The 50<sup>th</sup> Army would also remain in reserve at Andong<sup>160</sup>

The Chinese estimated the UNC force to consist of ten to fourteen divisions and one brigade, totaling between 100,000 and 120,000 troops. The CPVF had moved twelve infantry and three artillery divisions into Korea. The remaining four divisions and one brigade of the

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<sup>160</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 94.

NKPA were to augment the Chinese and assist in establishing a defensive line along the Pyongyang-Wonsan line. CPVF available strength stood at approximately 200,000 troops. The NKPA would provide another 24,000 to 26,000 troops. In light of this ratio of forces, General Peng felt confident that, while the Communist forces would not be ready for full-scale offensive action for some time, they were more than capable of halting the UNC offensive. However, both Peng and Mao had failed to consider the possibility that the UNC would prevent them from establishing their defense.

General MacArthur was engaged in an all-out effort to subdue the remainder of North Korea and was pushing hard to reach the Yalu River. On October 19, 1950, UNC forces captured Pyongyang as the CPVF began entering Korea. The next day, ROKA elements overran the proposed assembly areas of the Chinese 42<sup>nd</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Armies in the eastern region of North Korea.<sup>161</sup> The ROKA 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and Capital Divisions had advanced to the north and northeast of Hungnam and were preparing to advance into the mountain ranges to their north. In the west, the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions were located north and northeast of Sinanju, while the ROKA 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had almost reached the Yalu itself. The U.S. 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the British 27<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Brigade followed behind.<sup>162</sup>

The picture of fresh, well-supplied UNC troops racing for the Chinese-Korean border is belied by the fact these forces were at the limits of exhaustion. These units had been on the offensive since mid-September without respite and had been unable to fully replace their combat losses in men and equipment. Battle damage to North Korean rail lines, bridges, and port facilities imposed severe constraints on the UNC's ability to supply its forward units. Indeed, some units had been unable to advance beyond Pyongyang due to lack of spare parts and gasoline. UNC air forces attempted to alleviate this situation but were only able to deliver

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<sup>161</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 93-95, 99 and Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 43.

<sup>162</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 157-158. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 236.

approximately 700 tons of supplies per day to forward elements of the Eighth Army.<sup>163</sup> Despite these serious deficiencies, MacArthur continued to push his forces forward.

General MacArthur also demonstrated a complete disregard for the effects of the North Korean terrain on UNC combat operations. As the UNC advanced farther north, the Nangnim Mountain Range created a barrier between the Eighth Army in the west and X Corps in the east. The road network, which provided the only ground contact between these units, was unfit for sustained military traffic. As early as July 12, 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had identified the Korean road network, in general, as “seldom motorable” and requiring “extensive maintenance” for sustained use.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, A Far Eastern Command area study had acknowledged the detrimental effects of this region on combat operations and designated it a “barrier area-unsuited to large scale military operations.”<sup>165</sup>

As UNC troops continued their advance, factors combined to make them increasingly vulnerable to isolation and elimination. UNC units were “road bound” due to their mechanized vehicles and, utilizing the substandard Korean road network, would be unable to provide timely mutual support in the event of an enemy attack. Additionally, should these units attempt to move off-road, they would find their supply situation drastically worsened. Though available supplies could be moved forward on the roads, off-road terrain reduced their forward movement to a trickle. The high mountains also played havoc with radio traffic, often resulting in the loss of communications at critical times.<sup>166</sup> These are the conditions under which the Eighth Army and X Corps would have to face the CPVF as the Chinese scrambled to halt the UNC’s advance on the Yalu.

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<sup>163</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 127.

<sup>164</sup> Note by the Joint Intelligence Committee on Estimate of the Situation in Korea, 12 July 1950, p. 7.

<sup>165</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 128.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-137.

As the Chinese watched the UNC's operations with growing concern, they received more disturbing news. On October 20, Kim Il Sung informed Peng that the NKPA was no longer capable of sustained resistance and the burden of defense now lay squarely on the shoulders of the CPVF. The final collapse of the NKPA and the failure of the CPVF to establish its defensive line forced Peng to consult with Mao as to an advisable course of action. Based on CPVF and UNC force dispositions, Mao decided to conduct a holding action against the U.S. X Corps in the east and concentrate his forces against the three advancing ROKA divisions in the West. In recognition of the U.S. Army's firepower superiority, Mao directed Peng to stress to his subordinate commanders the necessity to "avoid being tied down by the American forces."<sup>167</sup>

Mao's desire was to inflict a crushing defeat on the UNC in the first engagement. He was aware the United States would not withdraw its forces from Korea unless they suffered a severe setback. Mao was also convinced that the CPVF was more than capable of accomplishing this feat, despite General Peng's continual cautionary statements concerning its combat readiness. Peng illustrates his realistic appraisal of the state of the CPVF in his October 22 message to Mao. In an effort to forestall a full-scale CPVF offensive, Peng stressed that the goal of the proposed limited offensive is to "extend and consolidate a foothold" and "to support (NKPA) guerrilla warfare in South Korea."<sup>168</sup> This is the first intimation that Mao and Peng held conflicting views on the capabilities of the CPVF. This conflict of opinions would play an increasingly important role in determining the Communist's success in reunifying Korea.

The CPVF launched its offensive on October 28, 1950. The Chinese quickly succeeded in isolating the ROKA 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. In accordance with Mao's plan to draw other ROKA elements into an ambush, they then waited for the UNC to react.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 95-97.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 160.



They were disappointed, however, when the commander of the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division recognized the trap and informed General Milburn, the I Corps commander.<sup>170</sup> When the UNC failed to take the bait the CPVF pressed on with a full assault and by nightfall had succeeded in overrunning not only the ROKA 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, but also four other ROKA battalions near Onjong.<sup>171</sup> By the evening of October 29, the ROKA reported the loss of 2,677 men of the 3,552 assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. They also reported the ROKA 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division now consisted of a single battalion. The ROKA 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division remained relatively intact, having suffered the loss of only two battalions.

These events threw the Eighth Army into a state of total confusion. Though it could claim the capture of ten Chinese soldiers, it was unable to determine the level of China's intervention. The question remained whether Beijing had committed CCF regular troops. Additionally, estimates of Chinese forces ranged from two token regiments, which Eighth Army G-2 reported, to I Corps G-2's report of two full-blown divisions of regulars. At UNC GHQ, General Willoughby refused to accept the veracity of I Corps' estimate and claimed that ROKA had exaggerated the size of enemy forces in an attempt to explain its sub standard performance. Willoughby remained convinced that the Chinese had not openly entered the conflict and were simply making a token gesture to save face.<sup>172</sup>

Eighth Army's failure to correctly determine the size and disposition of the forces opposing it ensured that the Chinese retained battlefield initiative. The CPVF's continued assault and the resulting collapse of the ROKA II Corps left the Eighth Army no choice but to withdraw and establish a defensive position just north of Sinanju on the Chongchon River. In what would become an increasingly serious problem for the Chinese, UNC air strikes added intolerable strain to the already overloaded Chinese supply lines, leading to massive supply

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<sup>170</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 165.

<sup>171</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 167-168, 171-172.

shortages in the assaulting CPVF units. Though the CPVF estimated it had destroyed the equivalent of one complete ROKA division,<sup>173</sup> it remained unable to break through the UNC defensive line. By November 5, the lines had stabilized and the next day, UNC aerial reconnaissance reported Chinese forces withdrawing to the North.<sup>174</sup> Although it was not as successful as Mao had hoped, the CPVF offensive had succeeded in blunting the UNC advance and had bought the CPVF some valuable time to prepare for its next offensive.

In X Corps' sector, the ROKA 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment encountered a sizable Chinese force north of Chinhung-ni On October 25 and succeeded in capturing two enemy prisoners. By October 28, X Corps had eighteen Chinese prisoners of war in its possession. These prisoners intimated that the Chinese had ordered twenty-four divisions to enter into combat in Korea. Though UNC forces had met stiffening resistance, which had stalled their advance north, X Corps G-2 dismissed the prisoners' claims. As in the west, contact with the CPVF would continue until November 5. The CPVF could not claim any great successes against X Corps but it had fulfilled its mission to delay the UNC advance in the east.

In the aftermath of the Chinese 1<sup>st</sup> Offensive, UNC GHQ stood bewildered. Chinese efforts to disguise the extent of their intervention had successfully confused UNC intelligence analysts. In order to hinder UNC intelligence efforts, China had assigned fictitious unit designators to those units active in Korea. The CPVF had also used decoys, in the form of surrendering soldiers, to provide the UNC with conflicting information.<sup>175</sup> As a result, both Eighth Army and X Corps had been unable to accurately assess the size of the opposing Chinese forces. Additionally, their reports to GHQ UNC had caused confusion due to inconsistencies in reporting enemy unit sizes and organization. For example, X Corps reported that a single Regimental Combat Team (approximately Brigade strength) had defeated a full Chinese division

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<sup>173</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 104-105, 107.

<sup>174</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 176.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 161, 163, 170, 179, 184.

and supporting NKPA elements. Eighth Army meanwhile reported three Chinese divisions and supporting NKPA elements had forced four ROKA and two U.S. divisions to retreat. They further claimed that a single Chinese division had mauled the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and then forced the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division to withdraw.<sup>176</sup>

Based on these reports, and the inability of the UNC to conduct ground or air reconnaissance beyond or close to the Yalu River, it was extremely difficult for UNC intelligence experts to determine the actual size or intent of the Chinese elements involved. Did these reports accurately indicate the size of the units engaged? Had the Chinese rotated their units into combat in an attempt to appear more numerous than they actually were? At this point, as general Willoughby asserted, it was difficult to deny that the Chinese *had* chosen to intervene. The overriding priority now was to determine in what strength they had entered the conflict and what their goals were.<sup>177</sup>

In the end, MacArthur arrived at an estimate of 34,000 Communist Chinese troops in Korea. He based this estimate on the fact that his aerial reconnaissance had not detected any large-scale movements of Chinese troops across the Yalu. In light of this small number, he advocated immediate resumption of the UNC advance. U.S. government officials did not agree. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated the cessation of MacArthur's offensive and the negotiation of a cease-fire to preclude further Chinese intervention. Other politicians desired the President to declare "end of mission" and create a demilitarized zone in North Korea pending the peaceful reunification of Korea. The United Kingdom supported this option.<sup>178</sup>

The National Security Council determined the final decision. They cited three options available to the United States. These options were to halt and assume a defensive stance, to

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<sup>176</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 186.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175. See also Bradley, *A General's Life*, pp. 372, 378-379 and J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe, An Autobiography*, p. 369

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 207, 219-220.

withdraw, or to continue the advance. The first two options were unacceptable for the same reason that the United States had initially committed forces to the defense of South Korea. Namely, to back down before a foe that was considered to be highly inferior would cause irreparable damage to United States international prestige and would endanger American efforts to contain communism in Western Europe. As such, the United States had no choice but to continue its offensive.<sup>179</sup>

MacArthur had an outspoken desire to forcefully reunify Korea. In his opinion, he had proven his judgement at Inchon by authorizing the assault in the face of heated debate. The success of the operation had left the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other governmental officials either unable or unwilling to stand publicly against him. Combined with the recommendation of the National Security Council, MacArthur's forceful arguments succeeded in gaining approval for the continuation of the UNC advance. Once again, the UNC began to move northward, having gained little or no respect for their newly arrived opponents.

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<sup>179</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 214.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE CHINESE 2<sup>nd</sup> OFFENSIVE

Recognizing that the UNC would soon resume its offensive, the Chinese again prepared for battle and substantially increased the size of the CPVF. Chinese leaders developed new battle plans and attempted to address the deficiencies noted during their first offensive. On November 25, 1950, the CPVF unleashed a furious assault against the unsuspecting, advancing UNC forces. But while the CPVF inflicted heavy losses on the UNC, it again proved unable to effectively isolate and destroy major UNC formations. The Chinese offensive ended with the UNC forced to withdraw down the Korean peninsula but the cost to the CPVF was extreme. UNC air power had a devastating impact on the CPVF's ability to maneuver and to effect re-supply of its combat formations. Additionally, UNC superiority in firepower and maneuver allowed it, in most instances, to fight off the Chinese attacks and effect an orderly withdrawal. The CPVF was able to claim a relative victory upon conclusion of the offensive but its forces were left exhausted, under-manned and critically short of necessary supplies.

By November 25, the CPVF had swelled to a total of thirty-three divisions. The 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group now consisted of the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Armies, totaling eighteen divisions. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group contained the 20<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Armies, totaling twelve divisions with 150,000 men. Three artillery divisions rounded out the combat power of the CPVF. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group was concentrated around the Changjin Reservoir in the east, opposite the U.S. X Corps. The 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group, located in the west, was more spread out. The 38<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Armies were moving towards Tokchon while the 40<sup>th</sup> Army advanced towards Yongbyon. The 39<sup>th</sup> Army was in the vicinity of Taechon. The 60<sup>th</sup> Army at Kusong and 50<sup>th</sup> Army on the Korean west coast constituted the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group's reserve forces.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 108, 264.

Mao and Peng had devised a new plan to lure the UNC forces farther north in order to ambush them. To aid the CPVF in this endeavor, Mao directed the release of one hundred prisoners of war (thirty American, seventy Korean). Peng also directed the Chinese Armies to employ small contingents to maintain contact with UNC forces and draw them into ambush positions, which the remaining elements of the armies were to occupy and fortify.<sup>181</sup> The Chinese plan directed the 13<sup>th</sup> Army to launch a full-scale offensive on the Eighth Army's bridgehead on the Chongchon River. The initial attack was to concentrate against the ROKA II Corps. As this was believed to be the weakest element in the Eighth Army, the Chinese hoped that its collapse would enable them to envelop and destroy the Eighth Army in detail. Meanwhile, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group was to attack the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Marine Regiments using the 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Armies. The 26<sup>th</sup> Army was to remain in reserve near the Changjin Reservoir.<sup>182</sup>

The Chinese estimated the UNC forces opposing them in the west to have a strength of approximately 130,000 troops. They estimated X Corps in the east to contain 90,000 troops.<sup>183</sup> Mao claimed that the UNC estimated the total CPVF strength in Korea to be somewhere between 60,000 and 70,000 soldiers.<sup>184</sup> In actuality, the CPVF and NKPA now contained over 380,000 soldiers. In light of the UNC's gross underestimation of Communist strength, Mao felt quite optimistic in his expectations of inflicting a decisive defeat on the Americans and their allies.

CPVF commanders, including General Peng, were not quite so optimistic. Chinese Army commanders had expressed their concern regarding the supply capabilities of their logistical services. They claimed transportation truck losses to UNC aircraft had placed considerable restraints on the CPVF's ability to deliver necessary supplies with the result that most units could

<sup>181</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 15-16. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 234.

<sup>182</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 111-112 and Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 16.

<sup>183</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 233.

<sup>184</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 111.

only claim to have one week's worth of supplies.<sup>185</sup> Various reports confirmed the CPVF's severe losses. The 4<sup>th</sup> Transportation Regiment had lost seventy-three of its one hundred assigned vehicles in a single air raid. Chinese transportation regiments were not the only units affected. An air raid on the Samdung Rail yard had destroyed eighty rail cars full of equipment and supplies. Hong Xuezhi claimed UNC air strikes destroyed 30-40 percent of Chinese supplies while they were enroute to the front. Nie Rongzhen supported this claim and cited the inability of Chinese artillery units to provide sufficient fire support due to a shortage of ammunition.<sup>186</sup>

Mao dismissed his commanders' concerns as inconsequential and detailed measures to overcome the resulting difficulties.<sup>187</sup> Yet Mao seems to have been aware of the serious supply shortages affecting his forces. On November 17, Zhou Enlai forwarded a request to the Soviet Union for 500 trucks. The message acknowledged China's inability to provide adequate supplies of food and winter clothing to the CPVF. Zhou further acknowledged this problem would "have an influence on the next stage of the fulfillment of the operation." Stalin agreed to provide almost 1500 automobiles, but would be unable to complete their delivery until December 5.<sup>188</sup> Despite this acknowledgement, CPVF supply difficulties seem to have had no affect on Mao's plans to resume the offensive.

Mao also seems to have underestimated the possible effects of the CPVF's technological inferiority on his combat plans. This was not the case with General Peng. In a meeting with his Army commanders, Peng severely criticized their failure to prevent UNC forces from withdrawing. "We routed the enemy more than annihilated them," he stated, and emphasized, in

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<sup>185</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 108. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 17.

<sup>186</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 50-52, 123, 126.

<sup>187</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 108.

<sup>188</sup> Zhou Enlai to Stalin, 17 November 1950, and Stalin to Zhou Enlai, 17 November 1950, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 49.

order for their second offensive to be successful, that the CPVF must not allow UNC units to escape. He further stressed the need for rapid movement to envelop the enemy.<sup>189</sup>

Meanwhile, the Eighth Army and X Corps resumed their drive north on November 8, 1950. By November 25, U.S. intelligence claimed 48,000 CPVF soldiers (six divisions) and 48,741 NKPA occupied defensive positions opposite the Eighth Army. In the X Corps sector, intelligence estimates placed the enemy strength at 40,000-70,935 CPVF and 82,799 NKPA soldiers. Opposite X Corps, UNC estimates proved fairly accurate, as Communist forces actually consisted of 150,000 soldiers. In the west, UNC estimates were disastrously low. In actuality, the total number of Communist troops facing the Eighth Army exceeded 240,000 soldiers.<sup>190</sup> As Mao had predicted, this intelligence failure would greatly enhance the element of surprise when the CPVF launched its initial attacks.

U.S. Intelligence also identified a concentration of Chinese forces in the Nagnim Mountains, which threatened to separate the Eighth Army and X Corps. To counter this threat, General MacArthur directed X Corps to reorient their advance and execute a link-up with elements on the Eighth Army's eastern flank.<sup>191</sup> X Corps was left scrambling to issue new directives to its subordinate units. As X Corps struggled to reorient its drive, U.S. Army divisional elements became separated. The result was the dispersion of the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and a concomitant reduction in command and control of subordinate divisional elements. Only the Marines, who had assembled south of the Changjin Reservoir, managed to maintain control of their subordinate elements. This retention of control would prove crucial in ensuring the Marines' survival during the coming Chinese offensive, just as its absence in the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would ensure the destruction of the 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat Team.

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<sup>189</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>190</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp.253, 267-268, 273. See also Bradley, *A General's Life*, pp. 595-598.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261, 322.



The Chinese launched their 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive on the morning of November 25, 1950. In the west, the Chinese succeeded in overrunning the ROKA II Corps. The Chinese 38<sup>th</sup> Army virtually destroyed the ROKA 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and by 1900 hundred hours, reported that they had inflicted 5,000 casualties on the ROKA and had occupied Tokchon. The ROKA 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was forced to withdraw under pressure from the Chinese 42<sup>nd</sup> Army and with the advancing Chinese 38<sup>th</sup> Army threatening its flank. Having committed all three of its infantry regiments to hold the line, it was left with no reserve to halt the 42<sup>nd</sup> Army when it broke through and was overrun by the Chinese.<sup>192</sup>

By the morning of November 26, although the Eighth Army had committed the majority of its reserves to combat, it had not realized the dire straits in which it now found itself. Eighth Army HQ maintained the ROKA II Corps was “fluid” and ordered the IX U.S. Corps to resume its offensive.<sup>193</sup> At 8:00 AM on November 28, the Chinese 113<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division occupied Samso-ri, well in the rear of Eighth Army, and established blocking positions. The Chinese also established blocking positions farther east on the Kunu-ri-Sunchon road and succeeded in ambushing a Turkish unit and the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, inflicting over 7,300 casualties.<sup>194</sup>

Though the CPVF had heeded Peng’s demands for speed, it proved unable to hold its blocking positions in the face of determined UNC air strikes and ground assaults. Though it succeeded in pinning down the UNC units and inflicting severe casualties, it could not prevent their escape.<sup>195</sup> On November 29, the UNC began withdrawing to the south and quickly placed one hundred miles between its rearguards and the CPVF’s advance elements.<sup>196</sup> The UNC had effectively employed its superior firepower and mobility to ensure the survival of its forces. As

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<sup>192</sup> Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, pp. 112-113. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 276-277

<sup>193</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 280, 283-285.

<sup>194</sup> Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, pp. 114-115. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 363.

<sup>195</sup> Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 220.

<sup>196</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 376.

the Chinese lacked the means to rectify this situation, the UNC would retain these advantages for the rest of the conflict.

The CPVF's marked inferiority in firepower played an even bigger role in the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group's offensive in the east. The 9<sup>th</sup> army Group succeeded in isolating the two U.S. Marine regiments (1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>) and the U.S. Army's 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT), but was only able to eliminate the 2,800 men of 31<sup>st</sup> RCT. Here too, Chinese lack of firepower had an effect as the CPVF was forced to commit approximately 50,000-55,000 troops in order to achieve victory. The Marines were able to fight their way back to friendly lines, though they also suffered heavy casualties. Upon conclusion of the offensive, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiments reported they were at 50 to 60 percent of their original strength.

In contrast to the Eighth Army, X Corps quickly grasped the seriousness of the situation in which it now found itself and assumed a defensive posture. X Corps' stubborn defense, combined with intense air strikes on Chinese troops, prevented the CPVF from exploiting its advantageous position to conduct a deep envelopment. After consolidating its forces at Hagaruri, X Corps executed a withdrawal to Hungnam on the coast. Just as in the west, the Chinese were powerless to prevent the UNC's retreat.<sup>197</sup>

On December 8, General MacArthur reported "Eighth Army successfully completed withdrawal south of Pyongyang on 5 December with opposition." He also passed on the X Corps commander's opinion "that he can hold the Hungnam bridgehead for a considerable period without serious loss and that he can successfully withdraw by sea and air from the bridgehead . . . without excessive loss of men or equipment."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 302, 308-309, 347, 380. See also Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>198</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 8 December 1950, Report on visit to FECOM and Korea, December 4-7, 1950, pp. 1,3.

General Peng officially ended the Chinese 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive on December 2, 1950, citing the requirement to rest and refit the exhausted soldiers of the CPVF.<sup>199</sup> Both the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Groups were in desperate need of replacements. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group had lost approximately 45 percent of its original strength and required 60,000 replacements. The 80<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> Divisions were so badly depleted that they would not see combat again until April 1951. When combined with the 45,000 casualties of the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Group, the total exceeded 30 percent of the CPVF's strength as it had been at the beginning of the offensive.<sup>200</sup> Yet not all of these casualties had resulted from contact with the enemy. Mao's refusal to acknowledge the CPVF's supply difficulties was also responsible for a large number of Chinese casualties.

The CPVF had begun the offensive critically short of food, medicine, ammunition and winter clothing.<sup>201</sup> These shortages had a direct impact on the CPVF's ability to engage in prolonged offensive action, particularly in the east. The Chinese estimate 30,000 of the 60,000 casualties suffered by the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Group resulted from frostbite.<sup>202</sup> Colonel Wong Lichan, CPVF Liaison to the NKPA, reported a large number of what appeared to be snowmen on the road from Kanggye to Chinhung-ni. Upon closer inspection, he discovered these were Chinese troops who had frozen to death.<sup>203</sup> U.S. Marines also reported finding Chinese soldiers, who had frozen in their defensive positions behind their weapons.<sup>204</sup> Supply shortages caused Chinese soldiers to die not only of exposure, but also of starvation. Peng himself claims 3,000 soldiers of the 60<sup>th</sup> Army died as a result of the CPVF's inability to re-supply them when they advanced too far south.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 116.

<sup>200</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, pp. 347, 386. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 33-34 and Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 123, 125.

<sup>201</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 118.

<sup>202</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 16, 51-53. See also Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 352.

<sup>203</sup> Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>204</sup> Roe, *The Dragon Strikes*, p. 389.

<sup>205</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 35.

The Chinese 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive also revealed China's lack of experience in mobile warfare. The CPVF's lack of sufficient mechanized/motorized transport rendered it unable to keep pace with UNC units. The Chinese had believed they could overcome this deficiency if they could infiltrate into the enemy's rear areas and isolate individual units. But the UNC's determination to save its mechanized units from annihilation surprised the Chinese. The CPVF, having only limited exposure to modern warfare, proved unable to grasp the complexities of mobile tactics.<sup>206</sup> Failure to maneuver effectively, combined with insufficient firepower, resulted in the CPVF's inability to prevent the withdrawal of UNC elements.

The Chinese again achieved a limited victory with their 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive. They drove the UNC forces back across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and succeeded in re-capturing most of the territory that North Korea had held at the outbreak of hostilities. The CPVF also reported the elimination of 36,000 UNC soldiers. It claimed 24,000 of these were American.<sup>207</sup> In two months time, the CPVF had successfully engaged and defeated (though not eliminated) the Americans' superior mechanized forces. Mao attributed China's victory to superior strategy and tactics.<sup>208</sup>

What Mao failed to note was that UNC misjudgment and carelessness had given the Chinese their victory. GHQ, UNC had failed twice to accurately assess the size, disposition and intent of its adversary and had paid a hefty price for its arrogance. By the end of the Chinese 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive, it had learned its lesson and would not be taken by surprise again. On the other hand, having tasted victory, Mao, Stalin and Kim were anxious to finish off the UNC and end the conflict in Korea. Despite Peng's continued pleas for additional time to rest and refit his forces,

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<sup>206</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember* p. 36, 77, 90. See also Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 118-119, 125.

<sup>207</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 118. Chinese reports were exaggerated. General MacArthur cites UNC casualties for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> offensives as Eighth Army: 7,337; X Corps: 5,638. See MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, p. 374. Official military statistics indicate that, for X Corps alone, total casualties sustained (all nationalities) were 8,735, of which 705 were KIA and 4,779 were MIA. See X Corps Battle Casualties, 27 November-10 December, 1950 at <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg>.

<sup>208</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 120-122.

the CPVF would be pushed to the breaking point as it launched one offensive after the other in its attempts to drive the UNC from the Korean Peninsula.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE STABILIZATION OF THE FRONT LINES

The Chinese initiated three more offensives between January and April 1951. As in the previous two offensives, Communist troops proved extremely adept at infiltrating and isolating UNC elements but were usually unable to eliminate them due to insufficient firepower. The CPVF also continued to suffer critical supply shortages. These shortages grew worse with time and severely hindered the CPVF's ability to achieve a decisive result. General Peng Dehuai sought to gain the CPVF time to rest and refit but found himself at increasing odds with Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung. The results of the first two offensives had convinced Mao of the superiority of his soldiers and served to reinforce his belief that they could crush the UNC forces in spite of their deficiencies. In an effort to effect a decisive end to the conflict, Mao continued to push the CPVF to launch one more "final offensive". As a result, by April 1951, an exhausted CPVF not only found itself incapable of penetrating the UNC defensive line, but also began to experience growing difficulties in containing the UNC counter-offensives.

Upon conclusion of their 2<sup>nd</sup> offensive, the Chinese could claim to have restored the majority of North Korea's original territory to Kim Il Sung. Mounting casualties and an inability to break the UNC's resolve led Mao to realize that the war would likely develop into an extended conflict. In December 1950, he informed Kim that China was willing to fight for one more year, but at that time, the NKPA should be prepared to assume the burden of prosecuting the war. On December 7, hoping to forestall a stalemate and acting on recent intelligence information, Mao and Kim urged General Peng to continue to prepare a new offensive and resume the attack before the UNC could regain its equilibrium.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 120-121, 123.

Mao was convinced that the X Corps' evacuation by sea from the North Korean port of Hungnam was a precursor to the United States' withdrawal from Korea proper. Mao was aware of the ongoing intense debate over this issue within the American government, which Chinese victories in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> offensives had sparked. In support of Mao's belief that the UNC forces were no longer fit to carry on the war, thirteen neutral countries introduced a proposal for a Korean cease-fire to the UN General Assembly. Mao perceived this action as an attempt to buy time for the UNC forces to re-establish their defense. Believing the UNC defense of South Korea was crumbling and hoping to hasten its collapse, Mao ordered the CPVF to prepare a new offensive.<sup>210</sup>

Both General Peng and his subordinate commanders were well aware of the CPVF's current state and urged a delay, claiming at least 2 months would be required to make the CPVF combat ready again.<sup>211</sup> As the UNC defense now claimed a strength of approximately 260,000 soldiers, it was apparent that an assault by the CPVF would result in heavy casualties unless it received both supplies and replacements.<sup>212</sup> Currently only 25 percent of the CPVF's supply requirements were being met and it had received no significant numbers of replacements. Peng claimed that, as the CPVF had only 300 operational trucks available to conduct supply operations, it had been unable to alleviate shortages of food and winter clothing. This in turn had led to an increase in casualties due to sickness, disease and exposure to the elements. In response, Mao promised Peng 2,000 trucks and 40,000 replacements by the end of February. In the meantime, the assault was to go forward.<sup>213</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> offensive began on December 31, 1950. Mao's original intent had been to eliminate 20,000-30,000 UNC soldiers. Realizing that this was beyond the current capabilities of

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<sup>210</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>211</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 18, 45.

<sup>212</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 125.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 18.

the CPVF, Peng appealed to Mao to change the offensive's objective. Mao concurred and redefined the objective to be the seizure of Seoul and the establishment of a bridgehead across the Han River. By January 5, 1951, not only had the CPVF captured Seoul, but the 38<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Armies had also established defensive positions on the south bank of the Han River. Peng called a halt to the offensive on January 8, 1951. The CPVF was exhausted. It had suffered additional heavy casualties due to shortages of ammunition and exposure to the extreme temperatures of the Korean winter. Chinese casualty estimates were greatly exaggerated. The CPVF had driven UNC forces eighty miles south and claimed to have killed an estimated 19,000 UNC soldiers while suffering only 8,500 killed or missing itself.<sup>214</sup>

Peng estimated that the combined forces of the CPVF and NKPA faced approximately 230,000 UNC troops, who were entrenched and supported heavily by indirect fires and air support.<sup>215</sup> Peng now claimed three to four months were required for rest and refit. Mao granted him two, with the caveat that the UNC might force them to fight earlier than they desired.<sup>216</sup> Meanwhile, Kim raged at Peng for his refusal to continue his assault against a defeated enemy, claiming the Chinese were exaggerating their problems.<sup>217</sup> Despite Kim's outburst, Peng remained firm on his position and began to rebuild his forces.

The CPVF did not receive two months to rest. UNC forces launched a counter offensive on January 27, 1951. Mao's response was to order immediate preparation for a 4<sup>th</sup> offensive, despite Peng's urgent claims that the CPVF was incapable of sustained offensive action.<sup>218</sup> Mao again set the objective as the elimination of 20,000 to 30,000 UNC soldiers.<sup>219</sup> Peng became more adamant in his request for a delay in launching the offensive. On January 31, and again on

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<sup>214</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 129-132. Chinese casualty estimates are unverified.

<sup>215</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 18.

<sup>216</sup> Mao to Stalin, 16 January 1951, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," pp. 55-56.

<sup>217</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 19. See also Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>218</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>219</sup> Mao to Stalin, 29 January 1951, Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," p. 57.



February 7, he communicated to Mao that the CPVF had still not received adequate supplies of boots, food, or ammunition. Mao's only response was to authorize Peng to rotate fresh CCF units into Korea.

The CPVF met with limited success in their 4<sup>th</sup> offensive and managed to contain the UNC's advance, but the end result was a setback for the Communist forces. In order to halt the UNC offensive, Peng adopted a mobile defense, which traded space for time. The front was thinly held and gave way to the advancing UNC units until the CPVF could organize a counter-attack to drive them back and retake the lost territory. In the face of the UNC's overwhelming technological superiority, this measure served to reduce the CPVF's casualties. The Americans and, in particular, their ability to coordinate their infantry and artillery impressed Peng. This was a capability that seemed to elude the CPVF.<sup>220</sup>

By late February, the Chinese offensive had again ground to a halt. Though the Chinese had inflicted significant casualties on the UNC,<sup>221</sup> they were unable to eliminate any major UNC formations. General Peng made an attempt to justify the CPVF's limited gains. "The enemy takes [full] advantage of its excellent equipment, air support and fast transportation," Peng stated.<sup>222</sup> It was clear to Peng that the Communist and UNC forces were rapidly achieving a state of parity. Nor did Mao remain ignorant of this fact for long. By March 1, Mao was forced to concede to Stalin that the CPVF was no longer capable of prosecuting a general offensive.<sup>223</sup> A frenzied effort to rebuild the Chinese and North Korean forces ensued.

By early April 1951, the CPVF had swelled to four major commands with a total of forty-eight infantry and nine artillery divisions. Their logistical network now boasted 180,000 personnel supported by three railroad engineer divisions and nine engineer regiments. Substantial

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<sup>220</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 138, 143, 149.

<sup>221</sup> Official U.S. casualty reports claim that the UNC suffered 21,076 casualties from 11-13 February 1951.

See <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg>.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted in Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 142. See also Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> Bajonov, *Assessing the Politics of the Korean War*, p. 90.

Soviet and Korean air assets in northeastern China were also available to provide air support. Facing them was a UNC force of approximately 240,000 soldiers who could rely on an additional 120,000 soldiers for reinforcement.<sup>224</sup>

The Chinese now realized they were susceptible to the threat of a UNC amphibious assault into their rear area. Not wishing to be caught in the same trap as the North Koreans had been, Mao and Peng began to plan a 5<sup>th</sup> offensive. Peng was aware of the CPVF's continuing supply difficulties but was committed to this offensive based on its preemptive nature. Hong Xuezhi claimed that, in spite of the expanded size of the CPVF's logistical support network, it was still only capable of supplying 225 of the 550 tons of equipment and ammunition, which the CPVF required daily. Based on the current situation, the Chinese had three options. The CPVF could attack, withdraw, or remain in place and be isolated when UNC forces landed behind. Mao and Peng felt the circumstances left them no other alternative than to attack.<sup>225</sup>

The Chinese 5<sup>th</sup> offensive commenced at 6:00 A.M. on May 10, 1951. The Chinese made limited gains until May 20, when they began to run critically short of ammunition. As casualties mounted and CPVF gains diminished, Peng called a halt to the offensive and ordered a general withdrawal. The Chinese retreat became a disaster when the UNC launched a counter-attack on May 23. Peng established a defensive line by May 27, but the effort cost the CPVF 85,000 casualties. The Chinese 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Group alone suffered 13,000 casualties.<sup>226</sup> At this point, both the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had no choice but to acknowledge the war had become a stalemate and to enter into negotiations for a cease-fire.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, pp. 147-148, 265.

<sup>225</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 46, 132.

<sup>226</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 152.

<sup>227</sup> Sheng, Michael R., "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: Reappraisal and New Documentation," in *Korea and World Affairs*, Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, Volume XIX, Number 2, Summer 1995, p. 7, document located at <http://kimsoft.com/korea/cn-korea.htm>.

Throughout these offensive operations in Korea, the Chinese were plagued by UNC air power. UNC air strikes proved extremely effective at inflicting casualties on the CPVF. On December 30, 1950, a UNC air raid reduced two regiments of the Chinese 1<sup>st</sup> Artillery Division to twenty-four guns when it caught them in movement.<sup>228</sup> During the 3<sup>rd</sup> offensive, Hong Xuezhi also reported to Zhou Enlai that the CPVF had, “suffered extremely heavy losses to enemy air raids.”

UNC air strikes also succeeded in crippling the CPVF’s logistical support of its combat formations. During the 4<sup>th</sup> offensive, the UNC had reduced the CPVF’s material re-supply by 60-70 percent. By April 1951, the CPVF supply lines, which had achieved a length of 300-400 kilometers, suffered continual disruption and CPVF engineers were unable to keep the Yalu River bridges operational due to UNC air strikes. UNC air raids also caused CPVF supply units to lose contact with the combat formations and further delayed the delivery of much-needed supplies. Though the Chinese expanded their air forces in response, they were unable to project this air power to the forward battle areas. The same UNC air strikes, which impeded the re-supply of CPVF combat formations, rendered the Chinese incapable of supplying fuel and ammunition to forward air bases in quantities sufficient to support forward basing of their fighter aircraft. As a result, they were forced to remain in the rear, where they could not provide effective air cover.<sup>229</sup>

Reduced supply had a concomitant effect on combat operations. Not only did CPVF units find it impossible to sustain their offensive operations without rations, but they also suffered grievous casualties due to exposure to the elements. The effects of the CPVF’s inability to provide adequate winter clothing reached critical proportions during the 3<sup>rd</sup> offensive. Cold weather injuries rendered the entire Chinese 586<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (196<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division)

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<sup>228</sup> Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, p. 130.

<sup>229</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao’s Generals Remember*, pp. 24, 124-125.

combat ineffective. The 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division suffered over 2,000 casualties to exposure. Many other regiments and battalions also reported they were combat ineffective and some divisions reported that the extreme cold had reduced them to 50 percent strength.<sup>230</sup> The resulting losses to exposure, and the Chinese failure to provide replacements in a timely manner, greatly extended the time required for the reconstitution of CPVF combat formations. This proved to have an increasingly detrimental impact on Chinese operations as the war dragged on.

Lack of sufficient ammunition further exacerbated the CPVF's inferiority in firepower and directly affected the outcome of its offensives by greatly reducing its abilities to annihilate enemy formations. Though the Chinese proved highly adept at infiltrating and isolating UNC units, they were rarely able to eliminate them.<sup>231</sup> This deficiency manifests itself again and again throughout the Chinese 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> offensives.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> offensive, the Chinese 39<sup>th</sup> Army isolated the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division but was unable to either eliminate it or prevent its withdrawal. The Chinese 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Armies experienced the same result in their confrontation with the ROKA 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The CPVF did achieve some successes, though these would be the last victories of this type for some time to come. The British 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade suffered the loss of thirty-one tanks as a result of their encounter with the Chinese 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The Chinese 42<sup>nd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Armies succeeded in eliminating the 31<sup>st</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> ROKA Regiments (ROKA 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division), as well as a regiment of the ROKA 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. They also captured over sixty ROKA artillery pieces.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> offensives saw no CPVF elimination of any major UNC combat formations. Though the CPVF captured 7,800 UNC soldiers, it allowed the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, as well as the ROKA 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions to escape. The battle for Chipyeong-

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<sup>230</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, p. 131.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

ni is the most prominent example of the CPVF's failure to pin and destroy UNC units. The 23<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Infantry Regiment, with the support of a battalion of French infantry, an artillery battalion and twenty tanks, successfully resisted all CPVF attempts to reduce its positions. Finally, during the 5<sup>th</sup> offensive, the combined forces of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPVF Army and the NKPA 5<sup>th</sup> Corps isolated the ROKA 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions but failed to eliminate them prior to their escape.<sup>232</sup>

These deficiencies were the direct result of Mao's exaggeration of CPVF and NKPA abilities. Likewise, he grossly under estimated the abilities of the UNC. Though Peng and his subordinate commanders quickly developed a healthy respect for the UNC forces opposing them, Mao refused to acknowledge the CPVF's difficulties and continued to urge them on. The result was an ever-increasing reduction in the combat capabilities of the CPVF at a time when China needed these qualities most. The UNC's expanding forces and capabilities now forced China to the negotiating table.

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<sup>232</sup> Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 130, 141, 151.

## SUMMARY

The nations involved in the Korean War signed an armistice on July 27, 1953. By this time, the war had become a political contest as the opposing armies jockeyed for position in an attempt to obtain concessions from their opponent at the negotiating table. It is clear that misperception on the part of Kim, Mao and Stalin, and miscommunication on the part of the United States, resulted in these nations committing their forces to war. However, Communist expectations of a short war failed to bear fruit and both China and North Korea found themselves embroiled in conflict for three long years.

The Chinese could claim victory in that they had fought the United States to a standstill and demonstrated to the world that they were a force not to be taken lightly. The CCF had gained a vast amount of experience in the conduct of modern warfare as well. Approximately 73 percent of China's infantry forces, 67 percent of the artillery forces and 100 percent of the armored forces participated in the conflict at one time or another. According to Chinese statistics, over three million Chinese volunteers eventually took part in the Korean War.<sup>233</sup>

The cost of China's "victory" was not cheap. The war resulted in a lengthy delay in China's economic reconstruction program. Indeed, they would not succeed in repaying their war-incurred debts to the Soviet Union until 1965.<sup>234</sup> The conflict resulted in over one million Chinese casualties, including 154,000 dead or missing.<sup>235</sup> The Chinese claim to have lost almost 400 aircraft and 13,000 vehicles. Additionally, Chinese troops would remain in North Korea until 1958.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>234</sup> Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 201.

<sup>235</sup> The UNC suffered over 500,000 casualties, including more than 94,000 dead. See Walter G. Hermes, Truce Tent and Fighting Front Chapter XXIII at <http://www.army.mil/CMH-PG/books/korea/truce/ch23.htm>. U.S. casualties totaled 109,958, including 27,704 dead and 4,442 missing in action (SOURCE: Pocket Data Book, 1962, Army Comptroller located at <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/documents/237ADM.htm>).

<sup>236</sup> Xiaobing Li, *Mao's Generals Remember*, pp. 5-6.

China failed not only in its dream of permanently removing the “imperialist” presence from the Korean Peninsula and eliminating the threat to its industrial basin but also ensured the permanent postponement of their offensive designs against Taiwan. On October 1, 1953, the Republic of Korea and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty, in which the ROK authorized the U. S. “the right to dispose . . . land, air and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea.”<sup>237</sup> A mutual defense agreement between the United States and the Republic of China (Nationalist China) followed on December 2, 1954. This document effectively precluded any overt Chinese aggression against Taiwan by granting the United States “the right to dispose such . . . land, air and sea forces in and about Taiwan and the Pescadores as may be required for their defense.”<sup>238</sup>

Though China could claim victory of a sort, Mao’s errors ensured that he would never realize his dream of a unified China. Marshal Nie Rongzhen best summed up the reasons for China’s failure to achieve its goals in intervening in the Korean War. “We entered the war in haste and were not well prepared. Moreover, we had little combat experience with the American army outside China,” he stated<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, October 1, 1953, document located at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/kor001.htm>.

<sup>238</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China, December 2, 1954, document located at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/chin001.htm>.

<sup>239</sup> Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, p. 53.

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## VITA

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