

China's Intervention in the Korean War Revisited

The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) staged a full-scale, undeclared war for two years and nine months, and a prolonged mutual political hostility ensued for decades afterwards. The PRC was declared an aggressor by the United Nations (UN) and was isolated from international diplomacy for a substantial period of time. Mao Zedong's decision to fight the United States, however, strengthened Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's trust in him immeasurably and dispelled his suspicions of China, forming the cornerstone for a strong Sino-Soviet alliance. In fact, the international order of the 1950s and 1960s was largely forged within the framework of the Korean War. Consequently, the reason for China's intervention in the Korean War has been an important topic in much scholarly research.

Until the 1980s, interpretations of China's involvement in the Korean War reflected the changing political and intellectual environments in the West in general, and the United States in particular, rather than the perspective of China itself. During the 1950s, Western scholars were influenced by the intensifying Cold War and argued that China's entry into the Korean War was primarily due to Stalin's direction to expand Communism.¹

On the other hand, in 1960 Allen S. Whiting, using Western intelligence sources, Chinese journals, newspapers, and Beijing's radio broadcasts, insisted that China's intervention was essentially a reluctant reaction to a perceived security threat. He stressed that it was only after MacArthur's successful Incheon landing in mid-September and his subsequent advance toward the 38th parallel that the Chinese leadership began making the necessary military preparations, concluding that an imminent threat to China's border security compelled China to intervene.² Whiting's argument was widely accepted in the West and developed by other historians. Specifically, Melvin Gurtov and Byong-Moo Hwang argued that after the failure of Chinese efforts to deter UN forces from advancing beyond the 38th parallel, PRC leaders began to push for large scale military intervention in Korea.³

1. Philip E. Mosley, "Soviet Policy and the War," *Journal of International Affairs* 6 (Spring 1952): 107-14; Alexander L. George, "American Policy Making and the North Korean Aggression," *World Politics* 7, no.2 (1955): 209-32.

2. Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York, 1960), 126, 159-60.

3. Melvin Gurtov and Byong-Moo Hwang, *China Under Threat: The Politics of Strategy and Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD, 1980), 56.

Furthermore, Gerald Segal believed that U.S. troops crossing the 38th parallel, no matter how much they were accompanied by soothing words of honorable intentions towards Chinese sovereignty, could not be tolerated in Beijing.⁴ There was virtually unanimous agreement among Western scholars that the U.S. decision to cross the 38th parallel triggered China's intervention and that if UN forces had stopped before the 38th parallel, China would not have intervened.⁵

With the declassification of Chinese documents and memoirs beginning in the early 1980s, however, Chinese scholars began to insist that the rapid U.S. engagement in the Korean War and Truman's announcement of the dispatch of the 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait confirmed to Mao that a major direct Sino-U.S. confrontation was imminent and inevitable. Therefore, Mao took the initiative and chose the most favorable time and battlefield for China—namely Korea—due to its proximity to the Soviet Union and Northeast China, China's industrial center.⁶

In 1994, Chen Jian considered the previous scholarship to be “Western impact, Chinese response” and “American-centered approaches.” He contended that “the Party's revolutionary nationalism, its sense of responsibility toward an Asian-wide or worldwide revolution, and its determination to maintain the inner dynamics of the Chinese revolution” constituted the three fundamental rationales dominating Beijing's formulation of foreign policy and security strategy at the time. Noting that Mao pressed ahead with sending troops, irrespective of Stalin's refusal on October 11, 1950 to offer prompt air cover, Chen Jian asserts that Mao persuaded Peng Dehuai not to resign as commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV), believing that “Korea's fate concerned both the vital security interests of China and the destiny of an Eastern and world revolution.”⁷ Chen Jian believes that Mao's primary motivation was the global expansion of Communism.

Recently, Chinese scholar Shen Zhihua has argued that despite Stalin's notification on October 14, 1950 that “the Soviet Air Force cannot enter Korea to participate in CPV ground operations even after two or two and a half months,” Mao proceeded to send troops to Korea because he ultimately wanted to obtain Soviet security guarantees and economic assistance for the future.⁸

4. Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (New York, 1985), 96.

5. Rosemary Foot, “Making Known the Unknown War,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no.3 (1991): 418–19; Simei Qing, “The U.S.–China Confrontation in Korea: Assessment of Intentions in Time of Crisis,” in *Northeast Asia and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman: Japan, China, and the Two Koreas*, ed. James I. Matray (Kirksville, MO, 2012), 93–118.

6. Yao Xu, *Cong Yalujiang dao Banmendian* [From the Yalu River to Panmunjom] (Beijing, 1985), 21–22; Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, “China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited,” *China Quarterly* 121 (March 1990): 106–8.

7. Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York, 1994), 4, 201–14.

8. Shen Zhihua, “China and the Dispatch of the Soviet Air Force: The Formation of the Chinese-Soviet-Korean Alliance in the Early Stage of the Korean War,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 211–30; Goncharov insists that, in the end, Mao decided to fight the Americans even without Soviet air support in order to protect China's own security, fearing that non-intervention would give Stalin an excuse to ignore China in the event of war against the

However, recent research, which has emphasized Mao's proactive role in the military intervention, has not been able to fully address certain issues. For example, on October 3, 1950, Mao informed the Soviet Union and North Korea that China would not send troops. Second, Zhou Enlai, premier of the PRC, left China to meet with Stalin at the Black Sea with plans for both intervention and non-intervention, depending on the degree of Soviet military assistance that was pledged. Third, on October 11, 1950, Zhou, in this meeting with Stalin, agreed not to send troops. The following day, Mao informed Stalin of China's non-intervention decision for a second time.

Based on new documents and archival material recently declassified in China and Russia, as well as interview material, this study reconsiders the following issues: 1) the initial effect of the Korean War on Chinese domestic affairs; 2) why Mao wanted to send Chinese troops to Korea in July and August 1950; and 3) why the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) emergency Politburo meeting on October 13, 1950 reversed Mao's non-intervention decision of the previous day and committed to sending troops to Korea without Soviet air assistance and weaponry. This study argues that the Chinese leadership believed that "if China dispatches troops, then the enemy should stop its advance northward at the Pyongyang-Wonsan line [on the spot]," and therefore, that China could secure the northern part of North Korea without fighting. This was China's chief objective in joining the Korean War.

MAO ZEDONG'S DESIRE TO DISPATCH CHINESE TROOPS TO KOREA AND STALIN'S SILENCE

Before the outbreak of the Korean War, both Stalin and Kim Il-sung predicted that the Americans would not interfere.⁹ However, only two days after hostilities began, the United States passed a resolution at the UN calling for all members to offer assistance to the Republic of Korea (ROK) and authorizing U.S. naval and air forces to support South Korea.¹⁰ Concurrently, President Harry Truman announced the dispatch of the 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait and declared, "the future status of Formosa [Taiwan] must await the restoration of security in the Pacific."¹¹

China immediately denounced the deployment of the 7th Fleet to Taiwan as an "imperialistic move" and an "intervention in its internal affairs," and a new theater

United States. Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA, 1993), 216-17.

9. Anatoly Torkunov, *The War in Korea 1950-1953: Its Origin, Bloodshed and Conclusion* (Tokyo, 2000), 50-51.

10. President Harry S. Truman argued that "if South Korea was allowed to fall then communists would be emboldened to overrun the free nations," and he maintained that the free world must meet North Korea's invasion with firm opposition. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman: Years of Trial and Hope*, vol. 2 (New York, 1956), 333-39; Resolution Adopted by the United Nations Security Council, June 27, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1950, vol. 7, Korea, ed. John P. Glennon (Washington, DC 1976), doc. 126, 211; Memorandum of conversation, by the ambassador at large (Jessup), June 26, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 103, 179.

11. Statement Issued by the President, June 27, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 116, 202-3.

for Sino-U.S. conflict quickly developed.¹² On July 1, 1950, the first U.S. ground forces, the Smith Battalion, arrived at Busan Port and engaged in its first battle with the Korean People's Army (KPA) at Osan on July 5.¹³ Moreover, under the Security Council Resolution of July 7, General Douglas MacArthur was appointed commander of the UN forces—primarily U.S. forces—marking the beginning of a full-scale intervention in the Korean War.

On the arrival of U.S. ground forces in Korea, China clarified its position on intervention. On July 2, 1950, Zhou Enlai, Premier and Foreign Minister of the PRC, informed Stalin that “if the Americans cross the 38th parallel, then Chinese troops, disguised as Koreans, will take action against them using volunteers.” Zhou also requested that “Soviet Air Forces be sent to provide air cover.”¹⁴ Clearly, China's pledge to participate in the war after American troops crossed the 38th parallel was based on a precondition that the Soviet Union would provide air cover for Chinese troops in Korea. On July 5, Stalin agreed to the Chinese request, promising that “we will do our best to provide the air cover for these units.”¹⁵ Therefore, an agreement was made that China's joining the war would depend on whether U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel, and whether the Soviet Union provided air cover for Chinese troops.

With Stalin's promise of air cover, China began to prepare for intervention. On July 7, 1950, at the meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC), chaired by Zhou Enlai, it decided to establish the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA), consisting of four armies and three artillery divisions, and that NEBDA troops would be in position on the Chinese-Korean border by August 5, 1950.¹⁶ Simultaneously, Zhou Enlai sent Chai Chengwen to Kim Il-sung to assure Kim that “China is ready to assist with anything [North] Korea needs in its war efforts,” and to request “Korean maps” and “samples of the KPA uniform.”¹⁷

On July 12, Mao met with Lee Sang-jo, Deputy Chief of Staff of the KPA, informing him that “if [North] Korea wished, China could dispatch troops, and

12. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and zhongyang dang'anguan, eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* [Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC], vol. 2 (Beijing, 2008), 524-26.

13. James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy Volume III 1950-1951, The Korean War* (Washington, DC, 1998), 53, 76; William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 47-48.

14. Zhou Enlai stated, “for this purpose, the Chinese leadership has already concentrated in Mukden (Shenyang) three armies numbering 120,000 personnel.” Roshin's cable to Moscow, July 2, 1950, *Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Archive of the President of the Russian Federation] (hereafter APRF), Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 331, Listy 75-7.

15. Telegram from Stalin to Roshchin, July 5, 1950, *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii* [Russian State Archives on Social-Political History] (hereafter RGASPI), Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 79.

16. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi kexueyuan, eds., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junsbi wengao* [Mao Zedong's Military Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC] (hereafter JYMZJW), vol. 1 (Beijing, 2010), 158-59.

17. Chai Chengwen and Zhao Yongtian, *Banmendian Tanpan* [The Panmunjom Negotiations] (Beijing, 1992), 36; Telegram from Shtykov to Stalin, July 15, 1950, *Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Russian Federation Ministry of Defense Central Archive] (hereafter TsAMO), Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 122, Listy 303-5.

that four armies of 320,000 soldiers were prepared for this purpose.” Mao emphasized that should Pyongyang agree, it would need to make a “request to notify China of Kim Il-sung’s decision before August 10.”¹⁸ This reveals that Mao strongly intended to dispatch troops in the initial phase of the war. In other words, for Mao, the crossing of the 38th parallel by the United States no longer constituted a precondition for China sending troops.

In early August 1950, North Korean forces occupied the entire Korean Peninsula except for the southeastern tip, down to what was called the “Busan Perimeter”—the last area controlled by UN forces. However, the U.S. and ROK military forces on the front line were superior to those of North Korea in terms of troop numbers and weaponry.¹⁹

By this time, the UN defensive line at the Busan Perimeter had also stabilized. Consequently, the Chinese leadership began to express concern and called for an imminent intervention. In the Politburo meeting on August 4, Mao pointed out that “if American imperialists win the war, they will become conceited and pose a threat to us. There is no alternative but to assist [North] Korea.”²⁰ Gao Gang, commander and political commissar of the Northeast Military Region, chaired a meeting of high-level commanders from August 13 to 14 and again expounded the necessity of prompt intervention, warning that “if the Americans occupied Korea, they would build up its military forces and would attack Northeast China and North China, and furthermore, our whole country.” He went on to ask, “Should we allow the Americans to occupy Korea and attack China, and then destroy them? Or would it not be better if we take the initiative, assisting the KPA to wipe out the enemy outside our territory and so defend ourselves?” He concluded, “of course it’s better to annihilate the enemies outside of our country’s territory.”²¹ Mao expressed firm agreement with Gao’s viewpoint.²²

Mao had also relayed to Moscow his intention to rapidly dispatch Chinese troops. On August 19, 1950, Mao, upon receiving Russian academician P. F. Yudin, stated,

If the Americans decide to win in Korea at any cost, they will need thirty to forty divisions. Under such circumstances, the Koreans won’t hold their own; they will need Chinese assistance. If assistance is provided, it will be possible ‘to mince’ those thirty to forty divisions. In the case where such a scenario is

18. Telegram from Shtykov to Stalin, July 20, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 122, Listy 352-5. By August 5, 1950, most of the Northeast Border Defense Army except for some artillery forces had completed assembling on the Chinese-Korean border. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC] (hereafter cited as *JYMZW*), vol. 1 (Beijing, 1997), 454-55.

19. Schnabel and Watson, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 73-79; Stueck, *The Korean War*, 48.

20. Junshi kexueyuan junshi yanjiubu, *Kangmei yuanchao zhanzhengshi* [A History of the War to Resist America and Assist Korea], vol. 1 (Beijing, 2011), 97.

21. Gao Gang’s speech at the military conference in Shenyang on August 13, 1950, *ibid.*, 98-99.

22. *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 469.

fulfilled, then a Third World War will be postponed. And this is, of course, extremely favorable for the USSR and the PRC.²³

In this way, Mao expressed his strong desire to dispatch Chinese troops regardless of whether or not American troops crossed the 38th parallel. Mao's position was reported to Stalin the following day.

In August 1950, the war had entered a stalemate, and the chance of North Korea to attain a quick victory on its own had disappeared. China hastened war preparations to enable it to begin fighting at short notice and decided to organize the second echelon.²⁴ On August 26, Zhou Enlai chaired the CMC meeting and announced that “dispatching troops will take place before long,” and that “we, well-prepared, have to achieve a quick victory.” He also expressed great regret that “we established the NEBDA in order to push Syngman Rhee off into the sea, to achieve victory at a stroke, but we did not use it.”²⁵

A consensus existed among the Chinese leadership to dispatch troops as quickly as possible, even when North Korea held the upper hand in the conflict. Why then did Beijing want to send troops earlier, breaking the promise with Stalin made on July 5?

First, the Chinese leadership was preoccupied with traditional security concerns, i.e., “*Chun Wang Chi Han* [if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold; if one falls, the others will be in danger],” predicting that if the United States were to occupy North Korea, China would be next. They also wanted to take advantage of North Korea's ascendancy. In the initial phase of the Korean War, Beijing acted much more proactively than Allen Whiting has argued.

Second, the outbreak of the Korean War and the announcement of the dispatch of the 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait shook the political and economic foundations of the newly established CCP regime. At the time, many Chinese people viewed these two events as omens indicating a Third World War between the United States and China, and rumors that it would begin in September swept the country.²⁶ In fact, in large cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, there was a dramatic increase in the number of cash withdrawals from banks, and stock markets crashed. Simultaneously, there were panicked rushes to buy daily necessities, such as rice, clothing, and penicillin.²⁷ In addition, rumors that “MacArthur and the Taiwan Guomindang (GMD) regime had agreed to reinstate Chiang Kai-shek in mainland China”; that “Japanese and American forces would attack Manchuria

23. Torkunov, *The War in Korea*, 94-95.

24. *JYMZJW*, vol. 1, 185.

25. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi kexueyuan, eds., *Zhou Enlai junshi wenxuan* [Collection of Zhou Enlai's Military Manuscripts] (hereafter *ZEJW*), vol. 4 (Beijing, 1997), 43-50.

26. Xinhua News Agency, ed., *Neibu cankao* [Internal Reference, hereafter cited as *NBCK*], July 1, 1950, no. 171, 1-3; *NBCK*, July 10, 1950, no. 175, 24-25.

and Central China, respectively”; and that “Chiang Kai-shek had declared an amnesty for GMD soldiers who surrendered to the CCP to allow them to go back to the GMD regime” were spreading quickly.²⁸ More importantly, rumors that there would be a “regime change (*Biantian Sixiang*),” specifically the downfall of the CCP regime and reinstatement of Chiang Kai-shek, and that military action against Taiwan would be abandoned in order to avoid a clash with the United States became widespread. Moreover, people tended to doubt reports of North Korea’s victories, and some local CCP leaders were convinced that “China couldn’t hold a candle to the U.S. militarily.”²⁹ In these ways, the Korean War threatened the very foundations of the CCP regime, and rumors and people’s reactions were reported to Mao daily. The PRC considered these very seriously. Therefore, on July 23, 1950, the Chinese leadership issued “Instructions on Suppressing Anti-Revolutionary activities,” a declaration of full-scale war against anti-revolutionary forces.³⁰

Under these circumstances, the PRC desperately needed a rapid North Korean victory to solve internal threats resulting from the Korean War and to guarantee the safety of the CCP regime. Assisting in bringing about such a victory would clearly be helpful to the CCP regime itself.³¹ Therefore, when North Korea gained the upper hand, dispatching troops meant “the most profit at the lowest cost.”

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the war, the Truman administration believed that the Korean War was “a clear-cut Soviet challenge to the United States” and a “preliminary stage of the Third World War,” and that only firm and effective countermeasures by the United States could deter future Soviet aggression in other places.³² The Americans, however, assessed that the Soviet Union was not ready to risk global war with the West and, thus, would not send its troops to Korea. At the same time, a full-scale Chinese intervention seemed unlikely as well, because

28. *NBCK*, July 4, 1950, no. 172, 12.

29. *NBCK*, July 13, 1950, no. 178, 40–41. Rumors that “the U.S. attempted to arrest Mao Zedong, Hainan Island had already fallen into the hands of the U.S. and Chiang Kai-shek, and Lin Biao was sacrificed” spread extensively. *NBCK*, July 13, 1950, no. 178, 39–40; *NBCK*, July 15, 1950, no. 179, 45; *NBCK*, July 22, 1950, no. 184, 79–80.

30. The Beijing leadership stressed that reactionary activities at home were “directed by imperialists abroad,” and it ordered all party organs and government agencies to take it as “one of their most important tasks” to “lead the people to ruthlessly eliminate all open and hidden reactionaries, thus establishing and consolidating the revolutionary order.” *Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, [Selected Important Documents since the Founding of the PRC], vol. 1 (Beijing, 1992), 358–60.

31. Chen Jian argues that Mao Zedong intended to intervene in the Korean War in late August and early September in order to accelerate the Communist unification of Korea or, at least, to prevent a possible reversal and speed the larger revolutionary transformation of Asia, a process in which China claimed the leading role. Chen Jian, *China’s Road*, 154–59.

32. CIA Intelligence Report, “Embassy Moscow’s view on the Korean Conflict,” Daily Summary Excerpt, June 26, 1950, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (hereafter CIA FOIA); Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington, DC, 1997), 391–92.

“Beijing might be tempted as a result of success in Korea to challenge Soviet leadership in Asia,” and it “would increase the risk of global war.” On the contrary, the CIA expected that Communist China would attempt to invade Taiwan, because it “would encounter much less international opposition than would Chinese military operations against Korea,” thereby “creating a further drain on U.S. resources.”³³ They predicted that if the Soviet Union desired a quick victory before UN forces were further reinforced, it could use 40-50,000 Chinese Communist forces of Korean nationality to lessen “the danger of political repercussion.”³⁴ The U.S. leadership believed that Chinese intervention before the completion of UN reinforcement would be “the principal key to the outcome of the War.” They assumed that the “best moment for Chinese intervention” would be “when UN forces were desperately defending the small area of Taegu-Pusan,” since “the influx of an overwhelming number of Chinese ground forces would have proved a decisive factor.”³⁵

By early September, the United States had noted the build-up of Chinese military strength on the Sino-Korean border and was concerned that Chinese intervention was imminent, but an intervention did not occur. This strengthened the Americans' belief that the Soviet Union and China would not intervene in the Korean conflict.³⁶ Even on the day that the Incheon landing operation was carried out, the CIA still concluded that there would be no direct and open Chinese intervention in Korea due to the Soviet Union's unwillingness to increase the risk of global war.³⁷

On the other hand, Kim Il-sung, from the beginning of the war, requested that Chinese ground forces and Soviet air forces be dispatched to Korea. On July 13, 1950, as U.S. air raids spread to North Korea's major cities, Kim Il-sung made a request to Stalin for troops from people's democratic countries, including China.³⁸ Furthermore, on August 19, when huge personnel and material losses occurred

33. CIA Intelligence Report, “Estimate of Soviet intentions and Capabilities for Military Aggression,” Intelligence Memorandum 301, June 30, 1950; CIA Intelligence report, “Communist China's role,” Weekly Summary Excerpt, July 14, 1950; CIA Intelligence report, “Soviet/Satellite Intentions,” Weekly Summary Excerpt, July 28, 1950, CIA FOIA; Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 396, 419-20, 425-27.

34. CIA Intelligence Report, “Soviet/Satellite Intentions,” Weekly Summary Excerpt, July 28, 1950; CIA Intelligence report, “Estimate of Soviet intentions and Capabilities for Military Aggression,” Intelligence Memorandum 301, June 30, 1950, CIA FOIA; Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 425-27, 396.

35. CIA Intelligence Report, “Communist China's Role,” Weekly Summary Excerpt, July 14, 1950, CIA FOIA; Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 419-21; The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Kirk) to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 563, 821-22.

36. CIA Intelligence Report, “Probability of Direct Chinese Communists Intervention in Korea,” Intelligence Memorandum 324, September 8, 1950, CIA FOIA Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 433-36.

37. CIA Intelligence Report, “Soviet/Communist Activity,” Weekly Summary Excerpt, September 15, 1950, CIA FOIA Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 437-38.

38. Telegram from Shtykov to Stalin, July 15, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 122, Listy 303-5.

due to heavy U.S. bombing, he again requested the participation of the Soviet Air Force.³⁹ However, Kim Il-sung's requests were not answered.

Therefore, on August 26, Kim Il-sung informed T. F. Shtykov, the Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK, that "because the war-front situation was very difficult, the Politburo of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) would discuss the issue of requesting troops from their Chinese comrades." At the end of the report, Shtykov added his own judgment, stating, "Kim Il-sung has lost his confidence completely in gaining a victory on his own and continues to attempt to seek our approval on this issue."⁴⁰ Two days later, Stalin sent his reply, encouraging Kim Il-sung by saying, "the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party had no doubts that in the near future the aggressors would be driven out of Korea in disgrace," and, "if necessary, we could supply additional bombers and fighter planes." However, Stalin did not mention Kim's request to dispatch the Soviet Air Force and Chinese ground troops, insinuating his disapproval.⁴¹ Seeming to understand this implicitly, Kim Il-sung did not raise this issue again until the end of September 1950.

Stalin was quite pleased with the international environment created by the Korean War, i.e., the U.S. military being dragged into the Korean Peninsula and substantially easing NATO's pressure on the USSR on the European front.⁴² Stalin expressed this sentiment in a message to Czechoslovakian President Klement Gottwald, stating that as the "American government continues to be tied down in the Far East," an exhausted United States "would be incapable of a Third World War in the near future," and that "this can provide us the time necessary for strengthening socialism in Europe."⁴³ All of these developments were completely in accordance with Stalin's interests. Moreover, Stalin

39. Kim Il-sung said to Ambassador Shtykov, "without air protection, it is impossible to carry on fighting the war anymore," and asked for the dispatch of an "international air force." Considering that the Soviet Union was the only country in the socialist camp capable of fighting against the U.S. Air Force, it could be considered that Kim had requested the intervention of the Soviet Air Force. Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky, August 19, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 122, Listy 621-3.

40. Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky, August 28, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 127, Listy 666-9.

41. Telegram from Stalin to Kim Il-sung via Shtykov, August 28, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 347, Listy 5-6. Kim Il-sung was very pleased with Stalin's encouragement, saying, "it would be useful to members of the KWP Politburo to know the contents of this letter." Telegram from Shtykov to Stalin, August 29, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 347, Listy 12-3.

42. By mid-July, the repeated defeats of U.S. forces and commitment of tens of thousands of U.S. troops to the Asian theater had instilled fright in Western Europeans. At the time, 60,000 German military police and 27 Soviet divisions were stationed in East Germany. However, there were only 12 poorly equipped and uncoordinated divisions in Western Europe with no air force. Dean G. Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, 1969), 435-40; Stueck, *The Korean War*, 54.

43. Telegram from Stalin to Gottwald, August 27, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 62, Listy 71-2.

perceived that an early Chinese intervention would jeopardize this favorable situation.⁴⁴

At the end of August, the Chinese leadership concluded that a protracted war was unavoidable and, consequently, they hastened preparations for entering the Korean War. However, on September 4, eleven U.S. fighters attacked Soviet airplanes and brought down a Soviet bomber in the waters off Lüshun. In response, Stalin ordered the 151st air division, stationed in Shenyang to provide air protection over Northeast China, to move to Lüshun to bolster the defensive capability of the Soviet military base there.⁴⁵ Thus, in effect, Soviet air cover for Northeast China was removed.

Finally, after the landing at Incheon by UN forces, which began on September 15, 1950, the war situation was dramatically reversed. At the same time, the determination of China's leaders for an intervention began to weaken. On September 19, 1950, Zhou Enlai explained to Soviet Ambassador N. V. Roshchin that "the USA, Britain, and France were extremely worried about the possibility of the entrance of the USSR and the PRC into the war in Korea," and that "if China moved troops from its southern provinces to Manchuria, then Britain and the U.S. would get very worried." This implied that the possibility of a peaceful solution to the Korean question still existed.⁴⁶ Two days later, Mao directed Gao Gang and Zhou Enlai "not to inform anybody that we have an intention of dispatching troops to Korea."⁴⁷ Moreover, on September 22, in a conversation with Yudin, Mao also insisted that "the Americans were not ready to conduct a protracted, large-scale war in Korea," and therefore he stated "we can't exclude the possibility that the American imperialists will try to find a way out of the situation without any serious damage, to achieve a compromise in Korea," revealing an intention to solve the conflict through dialogue.⁴⁸

The Chinese leadership informed the Soviet Union of the existing negative attitude in China toward Chinese intervention. On September 21, Zhou Enlai briefed Roshchin, saying, "there were some democratic personnel who expressed dissatisfaction that the war would be expanded and would require a certain sacrifice

44. Donggil Kim, "Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il-sung's different objectives in the early phase of the Korean War," *Hanguggwawa gugyejeongchi* [Korea and World Affairs] 30, no. 2 (2014): 45-77.

45. Statement of Soviet Union to the U.S. government, September 6, 1950, APRF, Fond 3, Opis 65, Delo 827, Listy 42; Report from Soviet Defense Minister A. M. Vasilevsky to Stalin, September 13, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 16, Opis 3139, Delo 16, Listy 170-1.

46. Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, September 18, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 331, Listy 123-6. In a reply on the issue suggested by Zhou Enlai on September 18, 1950, Stalin answered that a "peaceful solution of the Korean problem looks even more unachievable after the complication of the military situation, due to the landing of Americans in the area of Incheon." Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong via Roshchin, September 20, 1950, cited from Shen Zhihua, eds., *Chaoxian Eguo dang'an fuyinjian* [Collection of Russian Documents on the Korean War, hereafter cited as *CEDF*], vol. 6 (unpublished), 841-47.

47. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nianpu: 1949-1976* [A Chronology of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976] (hereafter *MZNP*) vol.1 (Beijing, 2013), 195-96.

48. Torkunov, *The War in Korea*, 101-2.

on the part of China.” On the same day, Liu Shaoqi hosted a dinner with Roshchin and Yudin and explained the domestic mood, saying that although the bourgeoisie, the leaders of democratic parties, and some young soldiers had assumed a “wait-and-see” or “negative” attitude, the whole of Chinese society, including the majority of workers, peasants, and the revolutionary intelligentsia, were “hostile to American imperialism and felt they would be capable, if necessary, of successfully defeating the Americans.”⁴⁹ By October 2, 1950, in reply to Stalin’s request to dispatch troops, Mao ingenuously acknowledged that “many comrades in the Central Committee of the CCP judge that it is necessary to show caution.”⁵⁰

This clearly reveals that the negative opinion toward intervention extended as far up as the CCP Central Committee. At the same time, the goals of the Chinese leadership gradually changed from attaining a rapid victory by sending troops to a peaceful settlement, or to preventing the U.S. army from crossing the 38th parallel, through either talks or threats.

FURTHER DELIBERATIONS REGARDING THE DECISION TO SEND TROOPS

On September 28, 1950, UN forces recaptured Seoul, and President Truman signed a document allowing UN forces to cross the 38th parallel. The following day, Zhou Enlai reported to Mao that “American imperialism has openly declared an advance to the north of the 38th parallel.” Kim Il-sung and Pak Hon-yong sent a joint letter to Stalin asking for “direct military assistance from the Soviet Union,” adding, “if for any reason this is impossible, then assist us by organizing international volunteer units in China and other people’s democracies.”⁵¹ Three days later, on October 1, 1950, MacArthur issued an ultimatum to Kim Il-sung calling for unconditional surrender. In addition to Kim Il-sung’s letter, Stalin himself sent a letter to Mao requesting that China send troops to assist North Korea.⁵² It was evident that Mao needed to make a clear decision immediately.

On the morning of October 2, Mao drafted a telegram to Stalin that stated, “We have decided to send some of our troops to Korea under the name of Chinese People’s Volunteers to fight the United States and its lackey Syngman Rhee and to aid our Korean comrades.” In the draft, Mao set the goal of Chinese action in

49. *Ibid.*, 99–101.

50. Mao’s verbal message to Stalin via Roshchin, October 3, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 105–6; *MZNP*, vol. 1, 201.

51. Report of Zhou Enlai on the war situation in Korea, September 29, 1950, cited from Jin Chongji, *Mao Zedong zhuàn: 1949–1976* [Biography of Mao Zedong: 1949–1976] (hereafter *MZZ*), vol. 1 (Beijing, 2003), 111; Telegram from DPRK leader Kim Il-sung and Pak Hon-yong to Stalin, September 29, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 347, Listy 41–5.

52. For the full text of MacArthur’s ultimatum to the Commander in Chief of the North Korean forces, see Memorandum of Conversations, by the Director of the Office of United Nations Political and Security Affairs (Bancroft), September 23, 1950 [Annex], *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 526, 762–63; Telegram from Filippov (Stalin) to Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, October 1, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 97–8; *MZNP*, vol. 1, 200.

Korea as solving the Korean problem by “annihilating and driving out the invading armies of the United States and other countries.” He then expressed the reasons for China’s sending troops: “if the Korean revolutionary forces met with a fundamental defeat, then the American aggressors would be more uninhibited once they occupied the whole of Korea. This would be unfavorable to the entire East.”⁵³ Mao emphasized that the purpose of the Chinese mission was not only to protect the Korean revolution, but also to promote an Eastern revolution.

However, in a meeting held that afternoon by the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, “most of the participants were opposed to sending troops to Korea.” Thus, Mao did not send the drafted telegram to Stalin.⁵⁴ Instead, on the night of October 2, Mao conveyed a verbal message to Stalin through the Soviet Ambassador, Roshchin. Mao’s verbal message and the earlier draft were completely different in content. In the former, Mao stated that “we originally planned to move several volunteer divisions to North Korea to render assistance to the Korean comrades when the enemy advanced north of the 38th parallel, however, having thought this over thoroughly, we now consider that such actions may entail extremely serious consequences,” and “therefore, it is better to show patience now, refrain from advancing troops, [and] actively prepare our forces.” Mao declined Stalin’s request on the following grounds: 1) Chinese troops were not strong enough; 2) a clash between China and the United States would ruin Beijing’s plans for a peaceful reconstruction and could force the USSR into a war with Washington; and 3) strong sentiments against China’s involvement remained among CCP officials.⁵⁵

Chinese scholars and government documents have indicated that Mao’s determination to send troops had never actually vacillated, implying that he had simply decided that “for the moment, China would not send troops to Korea.”⁵⁶ Specifically, Shen Zhihua insists that Mao purposely delivered an ambiguous verbal message to Stalin in order to obtain more time to convince CCP comrades and to negotiate better terms for the intervention.⁵⁷ To the contrary, Russian scholars have regarded Mao’s verbal message as an outright refusal to send troops, contending that Stalin was “stunned” with this unexpected change in China’s position and “sorely disappointed.”⁵⁸

53. *JYMZIW*, vol. 1, 539-41.

54. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 201-3. However, Chen Jian and S. Goncharov argue that the telegram drafted by Mao Zedong on October 2 was sent to Stalin. Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 175; Goncharov et al., *Uncertain partners*, 176-79.

55. Mao’s verbal message to Stalin via Roshchin, October 3, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 105-6.

56. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 201; Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Stalin yu Chaoxian zhanzheng* [Mao Zedong, Stalin and the Korean War] (Guangzhou, 2013), 282-85.

57. Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, *After Learning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Washington, DC, 2011), 39-40.

58. Torkunov, *The War in Korea*, 103-5; Evgeni Bajanov, “Assessing the politics of the Korean War, 1949-51,” *Cold War International History Project* (hereafter *CWIHP*) Bulletin, 6/7 (1995): 89; Alexander Y. Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War,

It is clear that Stalin and Ambassador Roshchin construed Mao's verbal message as "a refusal to send troops." Roshchin assumed that the "Chinese leadership had been influenced by the international situation, the worsening predicament in Korea, [and] Anglo-American intrigues through the intercession of [Indian Prime Minister] Jawaharlal Nehru, who had urged the Chinese toward patience and abstention [from intervention] in order to avoid catastrophe."⁵⁹ In a telegram to Kim Il-sung on October 8, Stalin also stated, "on October 1, I sent a letter to Mao Zedong, inquiring whether he could dispatch to Korea immediately at least five or six divisions," but "Mao Zedong replied with a refusal."⁶⁰

Furthermore, on October 3, Mao received Kim Il-sung's envoy, Pak Il-u, and informed him that "aside from sending troops, we will help however we can," thus reconfirming China's position of non-intervention.⁶¹ Therefore, it could be concluded that Mao's verbal message of October 2 can indeed be understood as "a refusal to send troops."

At 1:00 am on October 3, Zhou Enlai called V. M. Panikkar, Indian Ambassador to the PRC, in urgency to notify him that "if UN Armed Forces crossed the 38th parallel, China would send troops across the frontier to participate in the defense of North Korea," and to assert that the "Korean question should be solved peacefully at the UN by the nations concerned."⁶² It is clear that Zhou's warning was intended to deter UN forces from crossing the 38th parallel, thus averting Chinese intervention.⁶³ At that time, Beijing's goal was adjusted to the securing of North Korea by stopping the UN advance at the 38th parallel, significantly weakening the pre-existing "strong determination for intervention" and "the high spirit of revolution."

September 16-October 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives," *CWIHP Bulletin*, 6/7 (1995): 100.

59. Mao's verbal message to Stalin via Roshchin, October 3, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, List 106.

60. Letter from Stalin to Kim Il-sung via Shtykov, October 8, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 347, Listy 65-6.

61. Telegram to Stalin from a representative of the Soviet Army in Pyongyang, October 7, 1950, TsAMO, Fond 5, Opis 918795, Delo 121, Listy 705-6; Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu: 1898-1949*

62. *ZEFW*, vol. 4, 66-69. The message that the Indian government delivered to the UK was that China's intervention "would not take place if only South Koreans crossed the parallel." However, this was not found in any Chinese document. The Charge in the United Kingdom (Holmes) to the Secretary of State, October 3, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 583, 839.

63. The Americans regarded China's intervention warning as a bluff aimed at preventing the UN forces from crossing the 38th parallel. They even questioned "the reliability and accuracy" of Zhou's warning and estimated that Panikkar was "being used by the Chinese Communists to plant this information in an effort to influence U.S. and UK policy." However, Chen Jian and William Stueck argue that Zhou's warning was made in order to "win valuable time to complete final preparations" and to "justify China's interference in the Korean War at home and abroad." CIA Intelligence Report, "Possible Chinese Intervention in Korea," Daily Summary Excerpt, September 30, 1950; CIA Intelligence Report, "Possible Chinese Intervention in Korea," Daily Summary Excerpt, October 3, 1950, CIA FOIA; Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, 443-44, 445-47; Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 180-81; Stueck, *The Korean War*, 99.

On October 4, Beijing convened an enlarged meeting of the CCP Central Committee and continued to discuss sending troops to Korea. At the time, the majority still opposed this action. Many participants pointed to the following reasons for this position by stating: "First, China urgently needed to heal its wounds from the successive wars in the past decades. Second, the PRC was established only the year before; therefore, the economy was having difficulties. Third, land reform of the newly liberated areas and democratic reform of the cities had not yet been carried out. Fourth, local rebels, GMD agents, and counter-revolutionary riots were not yet fully dealt with, and the people's regime had not yet been solidified. Fifth, the weapons and equipment of the PLA lagged far behind those of the American armed forces, and China did not have command of the air and seas." Overall, they argued that "China should not send troops unless absolutely necessary."⁶⁴

However, Mao continued to deliberate over whether or not to send troops.⁶⁵ On the evening of October 2, Mao asked Zhou Enlai to send a special plane to bring Peng Dehuai from Xi'an to Beijing in order for him to attend the Politburo meeting on October 4.⁶⁶ Because Mao considered Peng Dehuai to be the only viable candidate for commander of Chinese troops, he felt that it was critically important to determine Peng Dehuai's attitude toward the intervention.⁶⁷ In a meeting with Mao on the morning of October 5, Peng was initially opposed to sending troops; however, after Mao's persuasion, he finally consented.⁶⁸ Then, Mao directly asked Peng to take command of Chinese forces in Korea and to express his views publicly to CCP Central Committee Politburo members when the meeting reconvened that afternoon.⁶⁹

Facing a Politburo that was still divided over intervention, Peng Dehuai emphatically announced his support for sending Chinese troops to Korea. He warned that "if U.S. forces advanced to the Yalu River, they could find an excuse to attack China at any time," arguing that "it was absolutely necessary to send troops promptly to Korea."⁷⁰

64. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 204.

65. *MZZ*, vol. 1, 119-20.

66. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 203.

67. According to the recollections of Wang Yazhi, advisor to the Chief of Staff of the PLA at the time, there were only six generals in the PLA who could command a united operation of multiple armies, namely, Peng Dehuai, Lin Biao, Liu Bocheng, Xu Xiangqian, Su Yu, and Chen Geng. Among them, Lin Biao, Su Yu, and Xu Xiangqian were confined to their beds due to illness, Liu Bocheng was appointed head of the establishing of an army academy, and Chen Geng was dispatched to Vietnam to assist with Ho Chi Minh's ground operations. Therefore, the only available person was Peng Dehuai. Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Stalin yu Chaoxian zhanzheng*, 290.

68. Zhang Baijia, "Resist the U.S. to aid Korea and Aid Vietnam to Resist the U.S.: How China Dealt with the Korean War and the Vietnam War," *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economics and Politics] 295, no. 3 (2005): 10.

69. *MZZ*, vol. 1, 119.

70. Wang Yan et al., *Peng Dehuai zhuan* [A Biography of Peng Dehuai] (Beijing, 1993), 402-3.

According to the recollection of Yang Shangkun, a future Chairman of the PRC who attended the Politburo meeting of October 5, I. V. Kovalev, a representative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Beijing, came to the Politburo meeting escorted by Shi Zhe, Mao's Russian interpreter. Mao received him for about twenty minutes at Fengze Hall, Zhongnanhai. On returning, Mao proclaimed: "Comrades! Look, the two horses insist on running forward. So, what can we do?" He was implying that Stalin wanted China to send troops. When Mao finished talking, the Politburo formally made the decision to dispatch troops immediately and appointed Peng Dehuai as commander.⁷¹

A. Ledovsky, who was then Soviet Consul-General in Shenyang, stated, "in the afternoon Politburo meeting of October 5, 1950, Mao Zedong showed Stalin's telegram to the participants and said that the 'old man' (Chinese leaders sometimes called Stalin *laotouzi* [old man]) argued in the telegram that we have to send troops to Korea." Hence, no one dared to raise any objection, and the decision to send troops to Korea was thus made.⁷² At the very least, Yang Shangkun and Ledovsky's explanation agreed with the fact that Mao had persuaded those with contrary views in the CCP, using Stalin's pressure as the basis for his argument.

On October 5, Stalin sent a cable to Mao requesting that he send troops. Stalin argued: 1) "the USA was not ready at present for a big war;" 2) "Japan was not capable of rendering military assistance to the Americans;" 3) "The United States would have to give in to China on the Korean issue, which was backed by its ally, the USSR;" and 4) if China entered the war, "the United States would have to abandon not only Taiwan, but also forsake its plot to restore Japanese militarism and turn Japan into its military springboard in the Far East." Stalin also warned Mao that "without a serious struggle and a new impressive demonstration of its forces, China could not get all these concessions," and that "China would not even get Taiwan." He added, "if war couldn't be avoided, then let it come now, not several years later when Japanese militarism would recover and [Japan would] become an ally of the United States." In addition, Stalin encouraged Mao by stating that "if China is involved in the war, because the Soviet Union and China have a treaty of mutual assistance and alliance, the Soviet Union would

71. Mao, metaphorically comparing China, the Soviet Union, and North Korea to three horses drawing a cart, said, "if two horses are running forward, does the third horse have anything else to do?" Su Weimin, "Yang Shangkun talks on the War to Resist America and Assist Korea," *Bainianchao* [Hundred Year Tide] 136, no. 4 (2009): 12.

72. In an interview with the author, Ledovsky stated that Gao Gang informed him of Kovalev's appearance on October 5. Author's interview with Ledovsky, October 19, 2004; A. M. Ledovsky, *СССР, США, КИТАЙ И КОРЕЙСКИЙ ВОПРОС Кто развязал корейскую войну?: МИФЫ И ФАКТЫ Взгляд из Москвы* [USSR, USA, China and the Korean question. Who started the Korean War: Myths and Facts, view from Moscow] (Unpublished Manuscript), 183.

also be involved in the war, and therefore, China need not be afraid of intervention," and by promising "joint fighting" against the United States⁷³

Regarding the telegram that Mao showed to the Politburo meeting participants on October 5, Ledovsky insisted that this was the above-mentioned telegram of October 5.⁷⁴ However, another Russian document has revealed that Soviet ambassador Roshchin relayed this telegram to Mao on October 6 at 10:30 pm.⁷⁵

Whether or not China would send troops was Stalin's main concern at the time. As soon as he received Mao's negative telegram on October 3, Stalin began to draft a telegram calling for the dispatch of troops, and he cabled it to Beijing on October 5. Since sending troops was under discussion at the Politburo meeting from October 4 to 5, Stalin's telegram had to be delivered to the CCP and Mao before they made their final decision. Therefore, it is highly implausible that Stalin's telegram, which was of such importance, was delivered to Mao a day later. Roshchin and Kovalev were then in Beijing on behalf of the Soviet government and the CPSU respectively. It is more likely that Kovalev, the CPSU representative, went directly to the Politburo meeting to deliver Stalin's telegram. It is highly probable, therefore, that when Kovalev came to the Politburo meeting on October 5, as verified by Yang Shangkun and Ledovsky, Stalin's telegram was relayed to Mao.

Why then did Mao switch his position and commit to helping North Korea? First, the United States and the UN made the decision to cross the 38th parallel: On October 4, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly approved the eight-Power draft resolution allowing UN forces to cross.⁷⁶ Therefore, on October 5, Mao told Peng Dehuai that "the UN forces have been marching toward the 38th parallel. We have to move forward immediately and gain the initiative," stressing the urgency of dispatching troops to Korea.⁷⁷

Second, the United States completely disregarded Zhou Enlai's warning from October 3. At a meeting with the delegation of the United Kingdom, Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson pointed out that "a greater risk would be incurred by showing hesitation and timidity." He particularly emphasized that "forces were in motion and plans were being made," and that "the Unified Command after a period of regrouping would be advancing into North Korea." Indeed, it was "too late to stop this process." He also stressed that "we should not be unduly frightened

73. Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong, October 5, 1950, cited from CEDF, Vol. 7, 909-13; A. M. Ledovsky, "Stalin, Mao Zedong and the Korean War, 1950-1953," *Новая и новейшая история* [Modern and Contemporary History] 5 (2005): 105-6.

74. Ledovsky, *СССР, США, КИТАЙ И КОРЕЙСКИЙ ВОПРОС*, 183.

75. From Roshchin to Stalin, October 7, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 126-8.

76. The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 568, 826-28; "Editorial Note," *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 604, 873-74.

77. Peng Dehuai, *Peng Dehuai zishu* [The Autobiographical Notes of Peng Dehuai] (Beijing, 1981), 258.

at what is probably a Chinese Communist bluff.”⁷⁸ It is clear that after the UN Incheon landing, Americans took Chinese press propaganda and warnings as an empty threat to deter UN forces from crossing the 38th parallel.

Third, Stalin exerted pressure on Mao. If China continued to refuse the request to send troops, the worsening of Sino-Soviet relations was inevitable. For the newly established CCP regime, heavily dependent on the Soviet Union for its economic development and national security, it was not easy to resist heavy Soviet pressure.⁷⁹

However, the decision made on October 5 was conditional on Soviet assistance. Upon receiving Ambassador Roshchin on the night of October 6, Mao informed him that “China will dispatch to Korea nine, not six, divisions” and request that “the Soviet Union provide these military units with weapons and equipment.” Moreover, Mao not only asked that the Soviet Air Force provide China with air cover, but also specified that “it has to participate jointly in the ground operations of Chinese forces,” which essentially constituted a “joint intervention.”⁸⁰

On October 8, Zhou Enlai left for the Black Sea with two potential plans that depended on whether or not they received Soviet assistance.⁸¹ Mao issued an order to establish the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army and informed Stalin and Kim Il-sung of his decision to enter the war.⁸² On October 7, the UN officially approved the crossing of the 38th parallel, and on the next day UN forces began to advance toward North Korea.⁸³ However, China’s intervention was again being debated through the dialogue between Stalin and Zhou on October 11 at the Black Sea.

On the afternoon of October 11, 1950, Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao arrived at Stalin’s Black Sea dacha and held a meeting with him there. First of all, Zhou Enlai elaborated on “the discussions of the CCP Politburo on the Korean issue and the difficulties for China in sending troops to Korea.” In particular, Zhou emphasized that “Chinese troops could be sent to assist [North] Korea if the Soviet Union agreed to dispatch its air force to protect Chinese ground forces in Korea.” Moreover, he “asked Stalin to provide the Chinese with military equipment and war material necessary to wage war for resisting America and assisting Korea.”⁸⁴

Stalin, however, replied that the “Soviet Union would not be able to dispatch its air forces to support the Chinese People’s Volunteers until after two or two and a half months,” and that “military equipment such as tanks and artillery offered by

78. Memorandum of Conversation by Mr. John M. Allison of the United States Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, October 4, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 602, 868-69.

79. Ledovsky, *СССР, США, КИТАЙ И КОРЕЙСКИЙ ВОПРОС*, 183.

80. Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, October 7, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 126-8.

81. *JYMZJW*, vol. 3, 372-74; *MZZ*, vol. 1, 121.

82. *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 543-45; Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin, October 8, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 132.

83. Resolution 376(V), Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, October 7, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 633, 904-6.

84. *ZENP*, vol. 1, 85.

the Soviets could be used only after six months, including for drills.” Furthermore, Stalin pointed out that “it is impossible for the Soviet Air Force to participate jointly in the ground operations of Chinese forces.” Consequently, Stalin and Zhou agreed that “if the assistance of a considerable number of well-equipped troops was not given to [North] Korea, the Koreans would not be able to hold out any longer and the North would be occupied by the Americans. If meaningful assistance was possible only after half a year, the Korean Peninsula would already have been occupied by the Americans and there would be no need for assisting forces.”⁸⁵

On the night of October 11, Stalin and Zhou, taking into account the above-mentioned factors and the “negative effects Zhou listed in the case of China’s intervention,” jointly sent the following cable to Mao:

We agreed on the following decisions:

- (1) Although the international situation is favorable, Chinese troops, due to their unpreparedness, would not cross the Sino-Korean border, in order to avoid an unfavorable situation.
- (2) If some troops crossed the border, they would not advance deeply and would be deployed in the mountainous regions near the Sino-Korean border.
- (3) Part of the KPA would establish bases in the mountainous areas north of Wonsan and Pyongyang. The others would go behind the enemy line and engage in guerilla warfare.
- (4) Among the recruits drafted in war time, the superior men and cadres would move to Manchuria in secret and regroup as a Korean division.
- (5) There would be an evacuation of Pyongyang and important cities south of Pyongyang.⁸⁶

At the end of the telegram, Stalin pledged that “the Soviet Union would fully satisfy China’s need for the supply of artillery, tanks, airplanes, and other military equipment necessary to equip Chinese troops.” However, he also told Mao that he and Zhou were “waiting for your decision,” shifting the responsibility of the final decision onto Mao. It is noteworthy that Zhou Enlai, without instruction from Mao, agreed on the spot with Stalin to not send troops. This fact suggests that the CCP leadership had reached a consensus prior to Zhou’s departure that China would not join the war without Soviet air cover and military equipment.

Stalin also insisted that “the KPA should be evacuated to Northeast China to preserve its potential strength for re-entering Korea.” At the meeting, Lin Biao rejected this idea, arguing that “given the mountainous terrain in northern Korea,

85. *ZENP*, vol. 1, 85-86; Stalin-Zhou Enlai Joint Telegram to Mao Zedong, October 11, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 134-5; Jin Chongji, *Zhou Enlai zhuàn* [Biography of Zhou Enlai], vol. 2 (Beijing, 2008), 921.

86. Stalin-Zhou Enlai Joint Telegram to Mao Zedong, October 11, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 135.

Korea is better for staging guerilla warfare. Therefore, it would be better for the KPA to stay in Korea, and not evacuate to Northeast China.”⁸⁷ However, Lin Biao’s argument could not persuade Stalin. Lin was probably worried that if the KPA evacuated to Northeast China, Northeast China would be turned into a primary battleground for fighting against the United States in the future.

At 3:30 p.m. on October 12, Soviet Ambassador Roshchin delivered the Stalin-Zhou joint telegram to Mao, who replied without hesitation, “I agree with the opinion of Stalin and Zhou Enlai.”⁸⁸ About seven hours later, Mao expressed his consent again to the content of the joint telegram, saying that “our troops have not yet crossed the Sino-Korean border and have been ordered to halt the implementation of the plan for entering Korea.”⁸⁹ Mao’s second notification seemed to be the result of consultations with Beijing leaders and their joint decision. Accordingly, Mao directed Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang “to halt implementing the war orders,” instead ordering them to “return to Beijing immediately to attend a Politburo meeting, which would re-discuss the decision to dispatch troops to Korea.”⁹⁰

On October 12, after receiving Mao’s answer, Stalin quickly informed Kim Il-sung that “the Chinese have again refused to send troops, and because of this you will have to evacuate Korea and retreat in a northern direction in the shortest possible time.” Stalin further specifically instructed Kim Il-sung that “newly-recruited Koreans are to move to Manchuria in order to organize a Korean division (the Chinese comrades have already agreed to this) that will be equipped with Soviet weapons.” Stalin also promised Kim that “in Manchuria, Korean aviation forces would be organized by Koreans under training in the Soviet Union, with planes provided by the Soviet Union.” Stalin’s telegrams to Kim clearly reveal Stalin’s plan to wage a general war based in Northeast China with the Korean divisions fighting along the Sino-Korean border.⁹¹ In such a situation, it would be inevitable that Northeast China would become a major battlefield. Kim Il-sung responded by saying, “we will carry it out.”⁹² Eventually, Stalin, Mao, and Kim reached a consensus that China would not send troops.

87. Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi furen shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu* [By the Side of Historical Giants: Shi Zhe’s Memoirs] (Beijing, 1995), 496-97.

88. Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, October 12, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 140.

89. Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin, October 12, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 141. Chinese documents including “A Chronology of Mao Zedong,” published in December 2013, never mentioned Mao’s two agreements with the joint telegram of Stalin and Zhou. See *MZNP*, vol. 1, 210-11.

90. *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 552. On the evening of October 12, Nie Rongzhen, acting Chief of General Staff, made a long-distance call to Peng to inform him that “there has been a change in the original plan, and Chairman Mao has ordered that you and comrade Gao Gang are to return to Beijing and discuss this matter.” Wang Yan et al., *Peng Dehuai nianpu* [A Chronology of Peng Dehuai] (Beijing, 1998), 442.

91. Telegram from Stalin to Vasilevsky and Shtykov, October 12, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 142-4.

92. Telegram from Stalin to Shtykov, October 14, 1950, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 335, Listy 3.

The “most unfavorable situation” Mao conceived of was that “if China advanced several divisions and the enemy forced Chinese troops to retreat, and this moreover provoked an open conflict between the United States and China, then China’s plan for peaceful construction would fail utterly, and many people in the country would be discontented.”⁹³ Chinese leaders may have anticipated that if Chinese troops were sent to Korea without Soviet air cover and weaponry, “the most unfavorable situation” would be unavoidable.

Mao and Zhou Enlai, in deciding against sending troops, wanted to avoid the most unfavorable situation, and they placed the highest priority on the protection of the “Chinese Revolution” itself. For them, the preservation of “Communist China” was far more important than any other domestic or foreign issue. Therefore, the fact that Mao informed Stalin of the non-intervention decision twice on October 12 largely weakens the foundations of the “security threat theory,” the “theory for Asian and world revolution,” and the “duty to implement the Asian revolution theory,” which were long claimed in the East and West alike to be causes for China’s intervention.

FINAL DECISION AND CORRESPONDING BACKGROUND

On the afternoon of October 13, with Gao Gang and Peng Dehuai in attendance, the CCP Politburo held an emergency meeting at Yinian Hall, Zhongnanhai. This meeting reversed Mao’s non-intervention decision of the previous day and finally decided to send troops to Korea. Therefore, clarifying the cause of the decision on October 13 will reveal the ultimate causes of Chinese intervention in the Korean War. Consequently, a detailed and systematic analysis of the corresponding decision-making process is necessary.

At 9:00 p.m., after the CCP’s emergency Politburo meeting, Mao informed Soviet Ambassador Roshchin, “we discussed Stalin’s joint telegram and Mao Zedong’s decision [the agreement not to send troops to Korea]” and “decided to send troops to Korea.”⁹⁴ Soon afterwards, at 10:00 p.m., Mao instructed Zhou Enlai via telegraph to respond to the Stalin-Zhou joint telegram of October 11, stating that “after discussion with comrades Gao Gang, Peng Dehuai, and other comrades on the Politburo, we are all still convinced that dispatching our forces to Korea would be beneficial to us.”⁹⁵

Five hours later, Mao sent a subsequent telegram that elaborated on the operational strategy. From this telegram, we can infer the reason why Mao reversed his

93. Mao’s verbal message to Stalin, via Roshchin, October 3, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opus 1, Delo 334, Listy 105-6; *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 540.

94. Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, October 13, 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opus 11, Delo 334, Listy 145.

95. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong wenji* [Collection of Mao Zedong’s Works] (hereafter *MZWJ*), vol. 6 (Beijing, 2009), 103-4.

decision from October 12 and the unanimous agreement by the Politburo to send troops to Korea. The text of Mao's telegram is as follows:

In Andong [currently Dandong], Comrade Peng Dehuai studied the war situation and holds that if we can dispatch one corps to the mountainous areas in Tokchon County about 200 kilometers northeast of Pyongyang and deploy three other corps and three artillery divisions to the Huichon-Jonchon-Kanggye area north of Tokchon County, then, first of all, the U.S. and its puppet troops, concerned [by the intervention of China], would stop their advance northward and thus we would be able to protect the areas north of the Pyongyang-Wonsan front, or at least the mountainous areas, from being occupied by the enemy. In this instance, without engaging in fighting, we can gain time to become equipped and trained.⁹⁶

At 9:00 p.m. on October 14, Mao telegraphed Zhou Enlai, explaining the operational strategy in detail and saying that "if the enemy tenaciously defends Pyongyang and Wonsan and does not advance [north] in the next six months, our troops will not attack Pyongyang and Wonsan." Mao emphasized that "only after our armies are well equipped and trained will we have clear superiority over the enemy in both air and ground forces," and then "we will discuss again the issue of attacking the enemy after six months." In a telegram, Mao pointed out the goal of military intervention by saying that "in this instance, we could extend China's defensive line from the Yalu River to the Tokchon-Yongwon line or immediately south, and we are confident in doing so, and it will be very beneficial to us as well." Mao added that "it will be difficult for the puppet troops in Wonsan to launch an attack on their own if the U.S. troops do not attack Tokchon from Pyongyang. So this leaves time for the entry of our troops [into the areas around Tokchon] and for the construction of defense works and the organization of our defenses."⁹⁷

From these two telegrams, we can reach the following conclusion: On October 13, the CCP Politburo discussed the issue of sending troops to Korea without prompt Soviet air and weaponry support, and they reached a consensus that "sending troops to Korea is extremely to China's advantage." They reached a unanimous decision on the grounds that "if China dispatched troops" and "established two or three defensive lines," then not only U.S. but also ROK troops would stop their advance northward on the spot. Thus, China, by securing the northern part of North Korea without fighting, would be able to extend China's defensive line to the northern part of North Korea and have six more months to be equipped

96. *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 558-59. On October 11, Peng Dehuai arrived at Dandong from Shenyang. On the evening of October 12, Nie Rongzhen called Peng Dehuai to inform him that "the Soviet Air Force is not able to assist the ground operations of Chinese volunteers for the time being." Therefore, before leaving for Beijing, Peng Dehuai was aware that the Soviet Air Force could not be made to move. Wang Yan et al., *Peng Dehuai nianpu*, 442.

97. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 213-14; Mao Zedong, "Mao Zedong's telegram to Zhou Enlai on military operations and deployment of the CPV after entering Korea (October 14, 1950)," cited from *Dang de wenxian* [Party documents] 5 (2000), 8.

and trained with Soviet weaponry. This certainly constitutes the determining factor for the October 13 decision.

If the situation turned out just as Mao expected, China would not only secure military superiority, including Soviet air protection and weaponry, but also take the initiative in the war, with an additional option of restarting offensive campaigns, depending on the next move of UN forces. The argument that if China dispatched troops to Korea, U.S. and ROK troops would stop their advance at the Pyongyang-Wonsan line was suggested by Peng Dehuai, and all of the Politburo members, including Mao, agreed with it.

More importantly, the Chinese leadership did not have any plan or intention to launch a preemptive attack and, in fact, had only prepared a defensive plan for a possible attack by U.S. and ROK forces. This defense-centered plan was called “*Yuanding xianzuzhi fangyude jibua* [Initially established defense-centered plan]” and was still in effect after China entered the Korean War on October 19. This plan was only altered on October 21, when Mao ordered Peng Dehuai to change it to include fighting ROK troops from Wonsan primarily, while pinning down U.S. troops in the direction of Pyongyang.⁹⁸

Because halting the enemy's advance and not engaging in fighting were crucial factors for intervention, it was no longer essential for the Soviet Union to dispatch its air force to Korea. On October 14, Stalin informed Zhou Enlai that “the Soviet Air Force could go only into Chinese territory and could not enter Korea for two or two and a half months.”⁹⁹ However, this did not influence China's decision.¹⁰⁰

Peng's argument was not groundless. As early as September 11, 1950, Truman formally authorized the UN occupation of North Korea, provided there had been “no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist forces [and] no announcement of intended entry,” and he emphasized that only South Korean forces would “be used in the north-eastern province bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border.”¹⁰¹ On September 28, this principle was reconfirmed by the directive of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to MacArthur.¹⁰² Consequently, the next day, MacArthur ordered all UN ground forces other than ROK troops to refrain from operations north of the “MacArthur line”—a demarcation extending from Jongju in the west through Kunu-ri and Yongwon to Hamhung.¹⁰³ Most of the UN soldiers heard a rumor that “[Pyongyang] was

98. *MZNP*, vol. 1, 213-14, 217-18; *MZZ*, vol. 1 126.

99. *ZENP*, vol. 1, 87.

100. Pang Xianzhi and Li Jie, *Mao Zedong yu kangmei yuanchao* [Mao Zedong and the War of Resisting America and Aiding Korea] (Beijing, 2000), 28-29; *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 567.

101. Report by the National Security Council to the President, September 9, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 499, 712-21.

102. The Acting Secretary of State to the United States Mission at the United Nations, September 26, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 537, 781-82.

103. Schnabel and Watson, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 105, 117-18; Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, DC, 1992), 670; Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences: general of the army* (New York, 1964), 358-59.

their final objective in the war, and once it was taken the American troops would leave Korea. Most of them expected to eat Thanksgiving Day dinner in Japan.”¹⁰⁴

Moreover, on September 27, 1950, Archibald Nye, Britain’s High Commissioner to India, informed Indian Prime Minister Nehru that the “U.S. did not wish to have its forces contiguous to the Chinese and USSR frontiers,” that “it was not the present intention for UN forces to go beyond the 40th parallel,” and that “the occupation forces of North Korea so far as possible would be composed of South Koreans.”¹⁰⁵ On October 6, British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin informed Nehru that “there is no intention on the part of the Unified Command to take any action that could be construed as a threat to China’s security” and “no troops other than Korean will be disposed near the China frontier.”¹⁰⁶ Bevin’s message was relayed to Zhou Enlai via the Indian Ambassador Panikkar on October 10.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, the measures taken to prevent China’s intervention actually propelled China to the decision to send troops.

On October 17, General MacArthur lifted this restriction, and two days later he reestablished a new limit of advance for non-Korean troops, beginning at Sonchon on the west coast, and then curving northeastward in an arc through Koindong-Phyongwon-Phungsan to Songjin (currently Kimchaek) in the east, mostly thirty to forty miles south of the Manchurian border. On October 24, however, MacArthur removed all restrictions on UN ground forces.¹⁰⁸

North Korea quickly relayed the movements of UN forces to China, including the limit for the line of advance for non-Korean troops. On October 12, just before Peng Dehuai left for Beijing to participate in the emergency Politburo meeting, Pak Il-u arrived in Dandong from North Korea and reported the latest war situation in detail, including the enemy’s advance and North Korea’s preparations for defense.¹⁰⁹ It seems that Peng Dehuai, based on his talks with Pak Il-u, argued that U.S. and ROK troops would stop their advance northward at the Pyongyang-Wonsan line. On October 19, Pak Il-u hurriedly traveled to Dandong and informed Peng Dehuai that “in the last two days the war situation has changed very adversely for us, two days ago (October 17), MacArthur cancelled the original rendezvous plan for the 8th army and X Corps at the Pyongyang-Wonsan wasp-waisted area and ordered them to advance northward east and west to the Yalu River.” Pak stressed that “if you don’t send troops quickly, the problem will become very serious,” showing that the limit line for the advance of UN forces

104. Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 647.

105. The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Assistant Secretary of State, September 28, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 553, 808-10.

106. Memorandum of Conversation by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusks), October 6, 1950 [Annex 3] Tab C, *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, doc. 625, 896.

108. Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 670.

109. Pak Il-u’s report to Peng Dehuai on the latest movements of UN forces was relayed to Zhou Enlai through Mao Zedong’s telegram. Hong Xuezhai, *Hong Xuezhai Huiyilu* [Hong Xuezhai’s Memoirs] (Beijing, 2002), 430; *JYMZW*, vol. 1, 558-59.

played a very important role in China's strategy.¹¹⁰ However, gaining information of the removal of the UN advance restriction did not affect the Chinese intervention. That evening, Peng met with Pak Hon-yong and stated that "it is still possible to establish the Tokcheon-Yongwon defensive line, while it is late for the establishment of original Pyongyang-Wonsan defensive line."¹¹¹

By sending troops to Korea, China could obtain additional benefits. First, it could prevent the KPA from evacuating completely to Manchuria, which would bring the war into China and threaten the stability of the CCP regime. Mao stressed, "if we do not send troops, reactionary forces at home and abroad will be swollen with arrogance when the enemy troops press to the Yalu River. Consequently, it will be unfavorable to all."¹¹² Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang also argued that the "Americans will arm the Guomindang and will finally attack China," asked "what is the use then of the victory of the Chinese Revolution?" and stated that "China should not wait motionless until the American imperialists attack China," emphasizing the urgent necessity of promptly sending troops and securing the northern part of North Korea so that it would at least serve as a buffer zone between China and the United States.¹¹³

In conclusion, it is clear that sending troops to Korea was extremely advantageous for China. Consequently, the CCP's emergency Politburo meeting on October 13 reached the consensus that China "should enter the war and must enter the war," as Mao had argued.¹¹⁴

Military conflict on the Korean Peninsula could have ruined the economic recovery plan of the newly established CCP regime and would have brought the U.S. army back to the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, Mao Zedong's China disapproved of Kim Il-sung's desire to unify the Korean Peninsula through military means.

In particular, the outbreak of the Korean War and the U.S. announcement that it was dispatching the 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait threatened the political and economic foundations of the CCP regime. Under these circumstances, the Chinese leadership wished to take advantage of North Korea's initial military

110. Hong, *Hong Xuezhì Huiyìlù*, 436.

111. Wang Yan et al., *Peng Dehuai zhuàn*, 410; *MZZ*, vol. I, 126. In this instance, by securing the north of Tokcheon-Yongwon as its defensive line, China still could extend its defensive line from the Yalu River to the Tokcheon-Yongwon line, which Mao stressed as a goal of Chinese intervention in the Korean War. Mao Zedong, "Mao Zedong's telegram to Zhou Enlai on military operations (October 14, 1950)," 8.

112. *MZWJ*, vol. 6, 103-4. At the second national public security conference held on October 16, 1950, Luo Ruiqing, minister of public security, argued that "anti-revolutionaries and anti-communist forces were running rampant nationwide," and that "they spread a rumor that the downfall of CCP regime was near, saying 'the darkness will vanish, the dawn will come.'" He continued, "Anti-revolutionary forces are destroying the domestic economy badly, obstructing military transportation, carrying out assassinations and organizing armed insurgencies." Yang Kuisong, "A Study in the Movement of Suppression of the Anti-Revolutionaries in the Early Period of PRC," *Shixue yuekan* [Journal of Historical Science] 40, no.1, (2006): 45-61.

113. Consul General Ledovsky Cable to Moscow, October 25, 1950, cited from Turkunov, *The War in Korea*, 108-9; Author's interview with Ledovsky, October 19, 2004.

114. *MZWJ*, vol. 6, 104.

success and send troops to assist in achieving a rapid North Korean victory, even though it meant breaking the promise made to Stalin on July 5, 1950, that “if the Americans cross the 38th parallel” China would send its ground forces. However, China’s desire was not realized due to Stalin’s disapproval; he was, in fact, highly satisfied with the international environment created by the Korean War. Generally, in the early phase of the Korean War, Beijing acted much more proactively than Allen Whiting has previously argued.

The Incheon landing by UN forces dramatically reversed the war situation. At the same time, the determination of the Chinese leadership to intervene began to weaken as well, and, when asked directly to send troops, Mao Zedong even informed Stalin and Kim Il-sung that China would not intervene.

Although under a security threat and pressure from Stalin, Mao Zedong decided on October 5, 1950, to send troops. The decision, however, was contingent on the degree of Soviet assistance. When Stalin, on October 11, 1950, refused to promptly provide air cover and weaponry, the Chinese leadership, without hesitation, again decided not to send troops to Korea, instead giving the highest priority to the protection of the “Chinese Revolution.” The Chinese leadership anticipated that if Chinese troops were sent to Korea without Soviet air cover and weaponry, there would be no possibility that China would win the war; conversely, the enemy would force Chinese troops to retreat and bring about “the most unfavorable situation” for China, further threatening the security of China and the safety of the CCP regime. This largely undermines the foundation of “the security threat theory,” “the Asian and world revolution theory,” and “the duty to implement the Asian revolution theory” that have long been promoted in both the East and West as explanations for China’s intervention in the Korean War.

However, Peng Dehuai, in the CCP’s emergency Politburo meeting held on October 13, argued that if China dispatched troops to Korea, the northward advance of U.S. and ROK troops could be stopped at the Pyongyang–Wonsan line. Thus, China, without fighting, would secure the area north of the Pyongyang–Wonsan line, extend China’s defensive line, and obtain time to equip and train its military with Soviet weapons. All of the Politburo members, including Mao himself, were in agreement with Peng’s suggestion. This certainly was the principal reason for China’s intervention on October 13. In fact, the U.S. government established a limit for the advance of non-Korean troops close to Pyongyang and Wonsan, and it took diplomatic measures to prevent China’s intervention. Ironically, the measures taken to prevent China’s intervention actually served to accelerate it.

In Mao’s assessment of the intervention, the overriding consideration was the preconditions for ensuring victory or, at a minimum, for not being defeated. Although Mao repeatedly promoted the expansion of “revolution” to Asia and the world, should practical national interest conflict with ideology, Mao consistently chose the former over the latter. China’s intervention in the Korean War was made based on practical considerations, keeping in mind the maximum benefits at minimum cost.