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Author(s): Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai

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China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited*

Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai

Thirty-seven years have passed since the Korean War ended in July 1953. The Korean War, which was one of the most dramatic events of the cold war, resulted not only in huge casualties on the two sides, but also in a deep wound in Sino-American relations which took more than two decades to heal. Vast amounts of research have been done on the war, but one important aspect—the motivation behind the decision of the People's Republic of China to enter the war—remains mysteriously masked, or at least unconvincingly explained.

Why did Beijing involve itself in a military conflict with the United States, the world's most powerful country, at a time when the newly established regime needed to be consolidated? What were the factors that led the Chinese to decide that they had to enter the war on behalf of North Korea? It has been generally accepted in the west that the Chinese were motivated by a combination of Chinese xenophobic attitudes, security concerns, expansionist tendencies and the communist ideology.¹ To what extent is this perspective historically correct? What is the Chinese perspective on this issue?

The purpose of this article is to try to explain from a Chinese perspective the motivation of China's leaders in making such a momentous decision, as revealed by Chinese sources recently released in China.

Historical Roots

China's decision to intervene in the Korean War on behalf of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had its historical roots. It was the natural result of gradually developed animosity between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and what it regarded as the foreign imperialist powers, especially the United States, and of the fear of a threat from the latter.

Over the past century or more, a quiet, self-reliant and complacent Middle Kingdom had been reduced by foreign aggressions to a semi-colony. Its populace was repeatedly abused and its national dignity, of which the Confucian intellectuals had been proud over thousands of years, was humiliatingly affronted. The first generation of the CCP's

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1. See Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision To Enter the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 2–13. Whiting comprehensively explored the question and reached many conclusions which are still widely accepted in the west.

top leaders, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, were Marxist intellectuals with strong nationalist tendencies. Their determination and will to restore China's dignity and power had won them the respect and support of the people.

However, since its establishment, the CCP had met hostile opposition from almost all western countries. The major western powers regarded the CCP as a group of rebels receiving dictation from Moscow. Out of the need to wage the war against Japan and to balance the influence of the Soviet Union, the CCP since the early 1940s had sought to establish some kind of relationship with the United States. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai stated their willingness for communist forces to be equipped by America and commanded by an American general. They even suggested going to the United States to meet President Roosevelt.² But they were deeply humiliated when the Americans did not even bother to give Mao a reply. The Roosevelt Administration decided in favour of an "island hopping" strategy rather than landing on the Asian continent, and with regard to the Chinese mainland, Washington obviously preferred a one-sided policy of supporting the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) in China.

Immediately after the Second World War, the United States became deeply involved in domestic Chinese politics. Although Washington did not take part in a direct military way in the civil war between the CCP and the KMT, it continued to furnish the KMT with diplomatic, economic and military assistance while attempting to mediate the KMT's conflict with the Communists.³ It was during the period of 1946–49 that Mao and his associates gradually adopted a one-sided policy of leaning towards Moscow, mainly because of their ever-increasing disappointment in the Truman Administration.

Although it was becoming disappointed with the KMT and was starting to view the nationalists as hopelessly corrupted, incompetent and being without the support of the people, the Truman Administration still refused to change its attitudes towards the CCP. President Truman saw the international communist movement, of which the CCP was a part, as monolithic and viewed Mao's force merely as Stalin's proxy. To help the KMT to wipe out communist forces, Washington gave Chiang Kai-shek's KMT government more than US\$2 billion of military and economic aid in the civil war. Despite this American aid, by the end of 1948, after three crucial battles in

2. Warren I. Cohen, "The United States and China since 1945," in Warren I. Cohen (ed.), *New Frontiers in American East Asian Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 130–46.

3. For the background to American policy towards China 1945–49, see Tang Tsou, *America's Failure in China, 1941–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: An Interpretive History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1971); Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Foreign Policy Toward the Communist China* (New York: Thomas Crowell, Co, 1972); Robert M. Blum, *Drawing the Line, The Origins of the American Containment Policy in East Asia* (New York: Norton, 1982); William U. Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation, American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

North China between the CCP and the KMT forces, it was clear that the CCP was headed for victory.⁴

The Truman Administration decided to adopt a policy of disengagement and non-intervention, waiting to “let the dust settle” in China. However, under pressure from domestic Republican opponents and the general public, who still favoured continued assistance to the Nationalists, the Truman Administration was still unwilling to approach Mao, and found it necessary to continue providing some limited support for the forces of Chiang Kai-shek, to conciliate the domestic critics and the China bloc, and to obtain support for major programmes for European economic recovery. In April 1949, US\$54 million in aid was extended to the Nationalists, and a few months later, another US\$75 million was appropriated for assistance to Chiang Kai-shek’s forces.⁵ Washington’s disengagement policy was therefore gradual and cautious, and sometimes ambiguous.

The Truman and Acheson disengagement policy and the non-intervention policy on the side of Chiang Kai-shek were misperceived by the CCP’s leadership. What Mao Zedong saw was continued American assistance to the KMT forces provided by the China Act of April 1948. Although Mao had noticed the ambiguity in Washington’s China policy, it only deepened his suspicion and distrust of the United States. In his New Year’s message in 1949, Mao Zedong wrote:

The U.S. Government has changed its policy of simply backing the Kuomintang’s counter-revolutionary war to a policy of embracing two forms of struggle: (1) organizing the remnants of the KMT’s armed forces and the so-called local forces to continue to resist the People’s Liberation Army south of the Yangtze River and in the remote border province; (2) organizing an opposition faction within the revolutionary camp to strive with might and main to halt the revolution where it is or, if it must advance, to moderate it and prevent it from encroaching too far on the interests of the imperialists and their running dogs.⁶

In late 1948, with the rapid collapse of the KMT forces in North China, CCP leaders began planning to cross the Yangtze river to liberate the whole country. Misled by the Truman Administration’s attitude, Mao Zedong began seriously to consider the possibility of American intervention and a direct military confrontation between the United States and the CCP in the liberation war against the KMT.⁷ In fact, Mao treated such a possibility as most likely to occur.⁸ In January and March of 1949, the CCP convened two important meetings: the enlarged meeting of the Politburo and the Second

4. Tang Tsou, *America’s Failure*, pp. 443–95.

5. The US\$54 million was extended from the unexpended fund of the China Aid Act of 1948. It was adopted by Congress as an amendment to the European recovery bill allocating to the “non-Communist area of China.” See Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, p. 36.

6. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (Mao-Zedong)* (Beijing: People’s Press, 1968), Vol. 4, p. 301.

7. *Ibid.* p. 5.

8. *Ibid.*

Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the CCP. In the first meeting, Mao Zedong delivered his speech “Cast away illusion, prepare for struggle,” which mainly dealt with relations with the United States, emphasizing that the possibility of American armed intervention on behalf of the KMT should be taken into full account so the CCP would not be caught unprepared if the United States entered the Chinese civil war.⁹ It was in early 1949 that Mao decided to abandon his hope of balancing American and Soviet influence and began to “lean to one side,” towards the Soviet Union, and to seek the economic and military aid that he badly needed from Moscow.¹⁰

Stalin cautioned Mao Zedong not to embark on any large-scale military operation, such as crossing the Yangtze to defeat Chiang's troops, for fear that America might intervene to save Chiang.¹¹ Mao, however, did not agree, and he believed that if such a possibility did arise, the United States could be defeated.¹² In Mao's view, if Truman wanted to conquer the CCP, he would need at least one or two million troops which he was unable to spare then.¹³ In April 1949, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) crossed the Yangtze river and seized Nanjing.

On 30 June 1949, Chairman Mao delivered his famous speech “On the people's democratic dictatorship.” He denounced the United States as an imperialistic power seeking to dominate China and announced that China would now “lean to the side” of the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Not long after that, the American ambassador, Leighton Stuart, left Nanking for the United States on 2 August 1949, and the State Department published its 1054-page White Paper on China three days later.¹⁵

Immediately after its policy towards American and the Soviet Union was decided, the CCP waged an anti-imperialist campaign against the United States.¹⁶ The newly established government set out to humiliate the United States by expressing its defiance of established foreign privileges in China. In so doing, it reflected a national attitude, or mood, deeply rooted in China's modern history. At the same time,

9. *Ibid.* p. 426.

10. From interviews. In conducting this research, the authors have had several important interviews with relevant people who, because of personal sensitivity, refused to be identified. Since their sources, insisted on anonymity, the authors can only attribute their sources as “from interview.”

11. See Chairman Mao's address on 11 April 1957, cited in *Study of Party History Materials* (Beijing: 1982), Vol. 22, No. 13.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.* p. 14.

14. See “On the people's democratic dictatorship: Soviet Union our best teacher” (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1958); or *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. IV* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press 1961), pp. 413–15 and 417.

15. See the China White Paper, issued by the United States Department of State in August 1949 under the title *United States Relations with China, with Special Reference to the Period 1944–1949* (Department of State Publication 3573, Far Eastern Series 30).

16. The CCP's soldiers and cadres invaded the American Embassy in Nanjing, molested consular officials in Shanghai and Mukden (Shenyang), seized the American consul's property in Beijing and jailed Consul-general Angus Ward in Mukden.

Mao Zedong initiated a nationwide criticism of Washington's China White Paper, and he himself wrote five articles for the Xinhua News Agency, criticizing United States China policy, dispelling some people's illusion about Americans, and helped the whole Party prepare mentally for a possible confrontation with the United States.

It should be noted that the CCP did not hope for American military intervention. In Mao's strategic planning, the first priority was to avoid such a prospect¹⁷; and if it failed the next was to prepare for it. For this purpose, the CCP leadership decided to take the following measures in the final stage of the liberation war:

1. To speed up the process of the war so as to lessen the chances of America's intervention. Immediately after the three great campaigns which annihilated Chiang's main forces north of the Yangtze river, Mao Zedong ordered the Third and Second Field Armies to prepare for crossing the Yangtze.¹⁸ Mao seemed to believe that the PLA must move at top speed to pursue the remnant KMT forces and completely wipe out the KMT forces in the whole country before the United States made up its mind. The aim, according to the directive of the CCP's military commission in May of 1949, was also to occupy the big sea-port cities which might be used by America as an excuse for intervention.¹⁹ For this purpose, the PLA's strategic plan, after crossing the Yangtze river, was to advance southeastward first and then southwestward. Within the half year, this objective was achieved, and Shanghai, Qingdao, Fuzhou and Guangzhou were captured. By April 1950, all of the mainland except Tibet was brought under the CCP's control. Meanwhile, CCP leaders began to organize an air force and a navy in preparation for liberating Taiwan.²⁰

2. Mao Zedong also decided to use an unusually large number of forces in a major campaign as a deterrent as well as a precaution against any American intervention. Mao ordered more than one million men to wage the Yangtze campaign against KMT forces which were numerically much inferior. The Second Field Army was actually designated as the unit to meet the possible American military intervention.²¹ After sweeping the KMT main forces off the mainland, the CCP stationed massive troops in the area of Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangzhou, three coastal metropolitan areas that were most vulnerable and most possible for the United States to attack; and

17. See Zi Zongyun, *Origin and Development of American China Policy* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1987), pp. 255–58.

18. The PLA's three strategic offensive campaigns occurred in Liaoshen, Pingjin and Huaihai in late 1948 and early 1949. In them almost two million of the KMT forces were annihilated; see *Major Events of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Beijing: Military Academy, 1985), p. 213.

19. See *Selected Works of Chairman Mao on Military Affairs* (internally circulated), p. 328.

20. Chen Xiaolu, "China's policy towards the United States, 1949–1955," a paper presented at the Conference on Sino-American Relations, 1945–55, Beijing, 19–25 October 1986, pp. 3–5.

21. Yao Xu, *From Yalu River to Panmunjon* (Beijing: People's Press, 1985), p. 2.

a national reserve force was created in Henan province from where it could support the above-mentioned three areas.²²

3. Mao Zedong stressed the need rapidly to recover and reconstruct the economy in the liberated areas in preparation for a possible United States blockade.²³ Facing inflation, unemployment, a financial deficit and harassment by the KMT remnants, the CCP decided to centralize economic and financial administration, unify the currency, tighten expenditures, organize food supply and improve productive efficiency. In fact, China's economy did recover with unusual speed, and output almost doubled from 1949 to 1950.²⁴

At the same time, CCP leaders were doing their best to avoid direct confrontation with foreign countries, especially the United States. Realizing that the PLA lacked knowledge and experience in foreign affairs, the CCP issued strict orders when it marched southward. They were instructed to give protection to all foreign residents in China and to foreign diplomatic personnel. They were also ordered not to attack first foreign troops stationed in China or their warships. The idea was to avoid a direct confrontation with western powers and not to give them any excuse to interfere in China's internal affairs.²⁵

The Korean War and the Chinese Concern

When the Korean War broke out on 25 June 1950, China was no more prepared for it than America was. There were several pieces of evidence to indicate that Beijing was not informed and thus not prepared for North Korea's military act.

First, the CCP decided to have a large demobilization of the PLA in early 1950. By May 1950, the total number in the PLA force reached 5.4 million, which had been a heavy burden in the tight financial situation facing the CCP leaders and in the ongoing economic reconstruction. In May 1950, the CCP Central Committee decided to demobilize 1.4 million of the PLA force totally and designated Zhou Enlai to be in charge of the work.²⁶ That started on 20 June 1950, five days before the Korean War broke out, and demobilization committees were set up at various levels.²⁷

Secondly, the Chinese leaders had paid very little attention to the Korean Peninsula and knew very little about the North Korean situation. The Chinese Embassy at Pyongyang was not established at the time the war broke out, and the Chinese ambassador, Ni Zhiliang, was not in his post until late August 1950.²⁸

22. Chen Xiaolu, "China's policy," p. 5.

23. Chen Yun, *Selected Works of Chen Yun* (Beijing: People's Press, 1982), pp. 307-10.

24. *Ibid.* p. 310.

25. Chen Xiaolu, "China's policy," p. 6.

26. See Nie Rongzhen, *Nie Rongzhen's Memoir* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1984), Vol. 3, pp. 721-22.

27. *Ibid.* p. 722.

28. From interview.

Thirdly, when the war broke out, the Chinese had only one army, the 42nd Army of Fourth Field Corps, stationed along the Yalu river border area.²⁹ The army was principally stationed there for crop-production purpose. In fact, the 13th Field Corps was in Henan as a national reserve force, the 9th and 10th Field Corps were in the eastern coastal area preparing for the liberation of Taiwan, the 18th Army was advancing into Tibet and all other armies and corps were shifted to production purposes locally.³⁰ The Chinese leaders were not informed of the North Korean leaders' decision.

Kim Il-Sung was reported to have discussed with Stalin his idea of military reunification of Korea in 1949; and when Mao visited Moscow at the end of 1949, Stalin brought up the issue with Mao and discussed Kim's military plan in general terms. In April 1950, Kim Il-Sung paid a secret visit to Beijing on his way back from Moscow. He only informed Mao of his determination to reunify his country by military means during the visit, and released no details of his military plan, let alone the date of the action.³¹ Only Stalin was informed of Kim's detailed plan and the possible date for action, since, in Kim's mind, the Soviet Union was the only patron capable of helping him to carry out his reunification plan.

The Chinese leaders had no intention at all of intervening in the war at its beginning, and they provided only moral support for Kim Il-Sung. Beijing tried to help Kim Il-Sung materially by sending to Korea, at his request, all Korean Chinese who were then serving in the PLA.³² All these Koreans (about 14,000) were organized into one fully armed and equipped division and one cadre brigade.³³ Mao was more cautious than both Kim and Stalin. He raised the possibility of American military intervention during his talk with Stalin in Moscow and with Kim Il-Sung when the latter visited Beijing, but Kim did not take it seriously.³⁴

The United States did intervene on behalf of South Korea. The Truman Administration took the view that the North Korean attack, directed by Moscow in support of the world strategy of international communism, endangered the fundamental principles and objects of American global policy, and threatened American national interests. On 27 June, Truman not only ordered direct American air and naval support for South Korea, but also decided to reintervene in the Chinese civil war by interposing the 7th Fleet between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, to "neutralize" the Taiwan Strait.³⁵ Since Taiwan had no capability to attack the CCP then, it was pointless to protect the mainland and simply an action to defend Chiang Kai-shek.

29. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, pp. 6-14.

30. From interviews.

31. From interviews.

32. Kim Il-Sung made this request to Beijing in January 1950; see Nie Rongzhen, *Memoir*, p. 744.

33. *Ibid.* p. 744.

34. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 22.

35. *Department of State Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 574 (3 July 1950), p. 5.

The CCP leaders took the American action as an “armed aggression against Chinese territory,” which confirmed Beijing’s worst fears about the threat from the United States. On 28 June, Mao Zedong denounced the American intervention as an “open exposure by the United States of its true imperialist face.”³⁶ Zhou Enlai declared on behalf of the Chinese Government that the American actions “constituted armed aggression against the territory of China and a gross violation of the United Nations Charter.”³⁷ Zhou further stated that “no matter what obstructive action U.S. imperialists may take, the fact that Taiwan is part of China will remain unchanged forever,” and that “all people of our country will certainly fight as one man and to the end to liberate Taiwan from the grasp of the U.S. aggressors.”³⁸

Mao and other Chinese leaders took this development very seriously, and they expected something worse would then happen. Mao believed that the United States had finally decided to involve itself in the Chinese civil war to rescue the KMT. On 7 July, the same day as the United Nations Force Command was set up, Mao decided to redeploy the 13th Army Corps, which consisted of four armies, from the Central–South Military Region to the Yalu River. He reorganized it, together with the local army, as the Northeastern Frontier Defence Army (NFDA), the predecessor to the Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV).³⁹ Deng Hua, former commander of the 15th Army Corps, was named as the commander of the NFDA. The NFDA’s task was to defend the security of the border and to meet any emergencies in Korea. The redeployment began in mid July. On 10 July, “the Committee of Chinese People Against U.S. Invasion of Taiwan and Korea” was established in Beijing.⁴⁰ On 5 and 18 August, Mao ordered the NFDA to finish all battle preparations before the end of September.⁴¹ At the same time, Mao also ordered the PLA to keep high vigilance along the coastal areas.

After closely watching the situation in Korea, General Deng Hua presented his assessment to Mao via Lin Biao in late August. He saw a great danger in the DPRK’s rapid push southward, overextended supply and undefended rear. He predicted that MaArthur might stage a counteroffensive by making an amphibious landing near Seoul or Pyongyang.⁴² Mao completely agreed with Deng Hua and ordered an additional army corps to strengthen the NFDA. At the same time, Mao cabled Deng Hua’s opinion to both Kim Il-Sung and Stalin, advising Kim Il-Sung “to go ahead steadily and strike sure blows.” Yet both Stalin and Kim Il-Sung ignored Mao’s warning; Stalin

36. Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (ed.), *Oppose U.S. Occupation of Taiwan and “Two Chinas” Plot* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 3.

37. *Ibid.* pp. 5–6.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Major Events*, p. 315.

40. *Xinhua Monthly*, May 1951, p. 12.

41. See Nie Rongzhen, *Memoir*, p. 734.

42. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 15.

instead approved Kim's tactic of "hot pursuit," leaving his rear unguarded and empty.⁴³ In early September, Gao Gang, the chairman of the Northeastern region, also sent his own report to Mao analysing the Korean situation. Gao apparently believed that the chance for DPRK to succeed in reunifying the country had passed and that Kim Il-Sung's military course would be halted. On 9 September, Mao instructed the 9th Army of the East Military Region to be deployed close to the railway, awaiting further deployment to the Yalu river.

True to General Deng Hua's prediction, MacArthur made a very successful landing at Inchon on 15 September, and the tide of war immediately was reversed. North Korean forces were badly hit under the weight of MacArthur's pincer attack, and the 8th Army began pushing northward. Mao took the situation very seriously. But he still did not give up hope of avoiding Chinese involvement militarily. Uncertain about the American intention, China launched her diplomatic efforts after the Inchon landing, mainly through the Soviet Union at the United Nations and through Indian diplomatic channels, trying to bring the United Nations force to a stop at the 38th parallel.⁴⁴

When the American forces under the aegis of the United Nations recaptured Seoul on 26 September 1950 and restored the South Koreans to their position prior to the war, leaders in Washington began seriously to consider the idea that North Korea could be defeated and that all Korea might be united under a pro-American government.⁴⁵ Most of the American military leaders favoured this idea, and the State Department thought it should not be precluded; finally the National Security Council recommended to the president that U.S.-U.N. forces might advance beyond the 38th parallel provided there were no indications of intervention by the Chinese Communists and the Soviets. On 29 September, President Truman approved the recommendation and authorized General Douglas MacArthur to carry the war into North Korea.⁴⁶ When the United Nations forces were poised to cross the parallel, China issued her most strongly worded warnings. On 30 September, Zhou Enlai publicly warned: "The Chinese people . . . will not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbours being savagely invaded by the imperialists." On 2 October Premier Zhou formally notified the Indian ambassador, Panikkar, that if the American troops entered North Korea, China would intervene in the war.⁴⁷

But all this was taken by General MacArthur and the political

43. *Ibid.* p. 22.

44. *Ibid.* p. 17.

45. As early as July 1950, United States officials began talking about crossing the 38th parallel; by the end of September, there was consensus about it. See Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-53* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

46. Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, pp. 82-90.

47. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, pp. 17-18.

leaders in Washington to be political blackmail.⁴⁸ Acheson even declared that Zhou Enlai was not an authoritative spokesman.⁴⁹

With the unusual movement of the Chinese forces and the sharp shift of official Chinese statements towards harsher warnings in September, China's response to the American actions was basically defensive in nature and arose out of her concern for her own physical security. Feeling uncertain about real American intentions, the Chinese leaders believed that it would be safer to prepare for the worst. It was only after South Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel that CCP leaders began seriously to consider the next step that China should take.

The Final Decision

After United Nations forces recaptured Seoul, the Indian prime minister, Nehru, told Chinese leaders that the three (western) foreign ministers' meeting had reached an agreement not to cross the 38th parallel, and that any further advance northwards would have to be decided by the United Nations.⁵⁰ Soon after, Ernest Bevin, the British foreign minister, indicated through Nehru to the Chinese that the United Nations forces would stop 40 miles away from the Yalu river if they were to cross the 38th parallel.⁵¹ Since the United States had twice gone back on its word passed on through India, Chinese leaders had reason to believe that the American pledge of not attacking China would be another trick. Zhou Enlai viewed American policy in the following way:

By using the bases in Japan, the United States inherited the adventurism of the Japanese militarists, following the history since the war of 1895 and took the track of conquering China, namely, to occupy North-east China before annexing China and to occupy Korea before grabbing North-east China. . . . For us, the Korean question is not simply a question concerning Korea, it is related to the Taiwan issue. The US imperialists have adopted a hostile attitude towards us and set up their defence line in the Taiwan Strait while paying lip service to non-aggression and non-intervention.⁵² From the information we got, they wanted to calm China first and after occupying North Korea, they will come to attack China.⁵³

It was natural that Mao's greatest concern was the physical security of the newly established regime, and that he was especially worried

48. Matthew Bunker Ridgway, *The Korean War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

49. Acheson's response was that "Chou [Zhou]'s words were a warning, not to be disregarded, but, on the other hand, not an authoritative statement of policy." See Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, pp. 96 and 110.

50. *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai*, p. 51.

51. *Ibid.* p. 52. This assertion is supported by documents in the *Foreign Relations of the United States*; see telegram from the American ambassador to India, Henderson, 27 September 1950.

52. *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai*, Vol. 2, p. 52.

53. *Ibid.*

about the possibility that the “new revolutionary regime may be strangled in its cradle.”⁵⁴ The most likely threat came from the United States, the patron of CCP’s rival, the KMT, and his concern deepened when MacArthur visited Taipei and later publicly raised the possibility of using KMT forces in the Korean battlefield.⁵⁵ Also at this time, the KMT remnants became much more active domestically; sabotage and harassment of local governments occurred everywhere. In late September, the People’s Republic of China’s public security ministry received intelligence reports that KMT remnants would bombard the Tiananmen rostrum with mortar projectiles during the celebration of the National Day on 1 October.⁵⁶ Mao told all Politburo members not to run away if the bombardment happened.⁵⁷

Even if Washington did not attack China immediately, it could establish a hostile regime on the Korean Peninsula and deploy its troops along the Sino–Korean border to insert military pressure, which would constitute a very grave threat to northeastern China, the industrial heartland of the country. The task of sustaining a passive defence of the region was impossible.⁵⁸ “How many troops are needed to guard the Yalu River of one thousand kilometres? Moreover, we have to wait there year after year without knowing when the enemy will come.”⁵⁹

To Mao Zedong and the other Chinese leaders, the ominous moment they had far-sightedly predicted and had tried to avoid for years did come at last—the necessity of fighting a war against America—and MacArthur’s open bellicose remarks against China seemed to make war inevitable.⁶⁰ Mao had to decide quickly whether or not to enter the war; otherwise it would be too late.

It was the most difficult decision the People’s Republic leaders had to make since the establishment of the new regime. To fight a war against a state as powerful as America, Mao Zedong had to have both internal and the Soviet support.

Internal Consensus. In late September and early October 1950, there were heated disputes in the top leadership of the CCP. On 1 October 1950, Kim Il-Sung sent a telegram to Mao Zedong reporting the grim picture on the battlefield and requesting that the Chinese PLA should directly intervene on behalf of the DPRK.⁶¹ On the same

54. *Mao on Military Affairs*, p. 213.

55. Chiang Kai-shek announced on 1 August 1950 that the talk between him and MacArthur had laid the foundation for “Sino–American co-operation” and “final victory” against the CCP. Then, on 26 August, MacArthur publicly urged that Taiwan be turned into a United States defence stronghold. See Congressional Quarterly Inc., *China: U.S. Policy Since 1945* (Washington: 1980), p. 91.

56. From interviews.

57. From interviews.

58. Chen Xiaolu, “China’s policy,” pp. 12–13.

59. *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai*, Vol. 2, p. 51.

60. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 22.

61. Kim Il-Sung also sent a telegram to Stalin on the same day (from interviews).

day, the CCP convened a special enlarged Politburo meeting which included 10 top leaders and lasted several days in order to make the final decision on whether or not to enter the war.⁶² Gao Gang, the chairman of the northeastern region, and Lin Biao, one of Mao's favourite generals, strongly opposed sending the Chinese forces to fight a war against America in Korea. The majority opinion in the meeting was concern about China's capability to win a war against the United States at that time. Lin Biao even refused, with an excuse of illness, to be named as commander of the CPV by Mao. Mao called Peng Dehuai, the chairman of northwestern region, back to Beijing from Xian to attend the meeting on 4 October, and intended to ask General Peng to head the CPV.

Mao Zedong asked those who were opposed to summarize the arguments against doing so. They did, stressing the following factors: Chinese inferior economic strength, inferior military power and less-consolidated rear defences.

First, it was noted at the meeting that America had emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful country in the world. Its annual output of steel in 1949 reached 87.72 million tons, more than 144 times that of China in the same year. The gap between the two countries in electricity, petroleum, other industrial products and grain was even greater.⁶³ China's agriculture and industry were still recovering, and could barely meet peaceful domestic needs, let alone the needs of a long and large-scale war.

Secondly, America was then the only country in the world possessing atomic bombs. Its air and naval dominance was overwhelming, and its war resources seemed inexhaustible. Though the PLA was numerically superior, a large number of its troops were pinned down all over the country. The strategic reserve forces that could be used were limited. The PLA was still using weapons and equipment captured from the KMT and the Japanese. Its firepower on the ground alone was inferior to America's. In 1950, one PLA corps had 198 artillery pieces, barely more than one tenth of those possessed by a similar American unit (1428), and even fewer than half those of an American division (476).⁶⁴ Moreover, the PLA was battle fatigued after four years of civil war without adequate rest and training.

Thirdly, the mainland was newly liberated, with the new regime still being established at the grassroots, and a great number of areas were undergoing land reform. Though the KMT's main forces had been defeated on the mainland, its remnants frequently harassed and raided the local governments. Some leaders at the meeting asserted that for China the major threat was from Taiwan, not Korea.

Mao Zedong agreed at the meeting that the three disadvantages discussed did exist, but said: "What you have said sounds reasonable.

62. From interviews.

63. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 20.

64. See "Study on enemy on Korean battlefield," compiled by the CPV's War Experience Study Committee (internally circulated).

But it would be shameful for us to stand by seeing our neighbours in perilous danger without offering any help.”⁶⁵ To Mao’s mind, if China stood by when North Korea was in peril; then the Soviet Union could also stand by when China was in peril; and “Internationalism would be empty talk.”⁶⁶ Also, he believed that there were some advantages to China in dispatching troops to Korea. He then made a strategic analysis of the situation.

First, Mao believed that a major direct Sino-American confrontation was inevitable. After Truman’s announcement that he was dispatching the 7th Fleet to protect Chiang, and after MacArthur’s belligerent remarks against China, Mao was more than ever convinced that such a confrontation was a matter of time.⁶⁷ He then pointed out three probable fronts where he thought America was poised to stage attacks on China: Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan. The first of these was a more favourable battlefield for China than the last two, because of its short distance from the Soviet Union and the industrial centre of China. If China let Korea become a hostile neighbour, a large number of China’s forces and resources would have to be stationed indefinitely along the 1,000-mile-long border.

Zhou Enlai later explained Mao’s thinking to the CPV’s high-ranking officials:

With the decisive duel between China and the US imperialists being inevitable, the question is where to do it; of course it is decided by the imperialists, but in some sense, also by us. Korea as a battleground chosen by the imperialists is favourable to us. . . . Looking at three battlefronts, it is easy to understand that it would be much more difficult to wage a war against America in Vietnam, not to mention on the offshore islands, than here [Korea]. Here, we have the most favourable terrain, the closest communication to China, the most convenient material and manpower back-up. . . . and the most convenient way for us to get indirect Soviet support.⁶⁸

Allen Whiting, when discussing China’s motivation to enter the war, emphasized several Chinese interests and goals, including the improvement in Sino–Soviet relations, the enhancement of China’s status in Asia and the reversal in United States–Japanese relations.⁶⁹ According to the Chinese sources available, these were considered by the Chinese leaders in making their decision but were less important factors. Mao was forced to enter the war by the situation created by the United States Government. His decision was based on a choice of the least dangerous of his limited options.

Were Truman’s promises that United Nations forces would stop at the Yalu river and take no provocative action against China reliable? Everyone at the meeting doubted that they were since America had already broken its previous promise—which had been solemnly

65. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 20.

66. See *General Peng Dehuai’s Memoirs* (Beijing: 1981), p. 326.

67. See *Mao Zedong on Military Affairs*, p. 351.

68. Zhou Enlai’s speech to CPV Conference. Cited by Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 22 fn. 1.

69. *China Crosses the Yalu*, pp. 151–58.

conveyed through the diplomatic channel of India – not to cross the 38th parallel.

But what advantages would China gain in fighting the most powerful country in the world? This was the most hotly debated question at the meeting. Mao and General Peng Dehuai put forward compelling arguments. In sum, they amounted to the following points:

1. Korea was the weak point in America's global strategy. It was pointed out that, though the United States was pursuing a strategy of global containment of communism, its strategic priority still lay in Europe, the Soviet Union being its main rival. Its military deployment in 49 countries made its already inadequate military forces even more thinly spread. The war in Korea would serve to disrupt America's strategic priorities and over-extend its defence line. It could not afford to fight a protracted war in Korea which would make its ill-balanced strategy even worse.⁷⁰ Besides American limited manpower, its low morale and the reluctance of its allies to be drawn in would also be advantageous to China.⁷¹

2. The atomic bomb had limitations. The scarcity of atomic bombs meant that it would be hard for Truman to use them in a peripheral area since they had been originally intended primarily to check the Soviet Union. If the bombs were used against China, the bombs' effects would be limited by China's vast size and thinly spread population. In Korea, it would be even more difficult to use the atomic bomb since the hostile forces would be so close to each other. In addition, Soviet knowledge of the atomic bomb also reduced the fear of the Chinese leaders.⁷²

Although Chinese leaders regarded the atomic bomb as a paper tiger, they did seriously weigh the consequences of its use. Allen Whiting inferred that "it may be that Soviet Union strategic estimates led the Chinese Communist analysts to recognize the possibility of a U.S. atomic attack but to underestimate its consequences."⁷³ In fact, the Soviet Union's estimate of the bomb did not have much influence on Chinese leaders; they made their own estimate from a purely Chinese perspective.

3. There was a geographical advantage. The narrow shape of the Korean peninsula and the mountainous area in North Korea would greatly limit the mobility of MacArthur's mechanized forces and ground firepower, and it would be advantageous for China in conducting defensive actions. Though MacArthur could get part of his logistic support from Japan, the greater part of his supplies would have to be transported from America – more than 10,000 miles away. By comparison, China's supply route from home, and from the Soviet Union, would be much shorter.⁷⁴

70. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, pp. 23–25.

71. CCP Central Committee, "Instruction on current issue propaganda," 26 October 1950.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*.

74. CCP Central Committee, "Instruction."

Moreover, MacArthur's arrogance and underestimation of China's capability of intervening, his shortage of manpower and the lack of effective co-ordination of United Nations forces were also thought to create conditions advantageous to China, if she were to stage a surprise attack.

In predicting the course of the war, one participant gave three different possibilities:

(1) our neighbour goes into war while peace is maintained in our country; (2) our neighbour goes into war while the enemy bombs our country; (3) our neighbour goes into war while the enemy lands its troops on our coast and the whole country is involved in the war. For the time being, our policy is based on the second scenario.⁷⁵

The worst case, Mao believed, would be that the CPV could not destroy the enemy troops in Korea and the Americans would declare a full-scale war against China. Then the recovery of the national economy would be delayed and people would suffer for a period of time. However, many CCP leaders believed that it was necessary to make some sacrifices for the sake of the long-term national interest. As General Peng Dehuai stated on 5 October, "it is necessary to dispatch troops to Korea. If China is devastated in war, it only means that the liberation war against the KMT will last a few years longer."⁷⁶

Therefore, it was logical that the CCP leaders selected Korea as the place to fight against the United States, believing as they did that the Truman Administration had taken the first step in invading China from three directions: Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam.⁷⁷

On 2 October, Mao Zedong decided that China should send a force across the Yalu river to support the DPRK, and suggested that:

we send some forces under the name of Volunteers to fight against America and its running dogs of Syngman Rhee's forces, together with the North Korean comrades, because if Korea was occupied by Americans, the Korean revolutionary forces would be completely eliminated, and the American imperialists would become even more arrogant and militant, and it would be disadvantageous to the whole East.⁷⁸

The decision to send forces across the Yalu was approved by the special Politburo meeting on the same day, provided that the Soviet Union could provide the CPV with air force support and war materials.⁷⁹ The same day the CCP Central Committee telegraphed this decision to Stalin.

Soviet Support. Even though internal support was relatively secured, Mao still had to seek Soviet support. Because of American weapon and air force superiority, it would be almost impossible for

75. *Selected Works of Chen Yun, 1949–1966* (Beijing: People's Press, 1982), p. 112.

76. Peng Dehuai, *Memoirs*, pp. 257–58.

77. Chen Xiaolu, "China's policy," p. 15.

78. *Mao Zedong on Military Affairs*, p. 345.

79. From interviews.

the CPV to succeed in countering MacArthur's march without Soviet material support – especially its air force support, since the PLA had no air force at all at that time.

The differences between Stalin and Mao can be traced back to the 1930s. When Mao Zedong established his dominant leadership in the CCP, Stalin regarded it with a suspicious eye, considering Mao as a nationalist rather than a Marxist. He tried to replace Mao with Moscow-indoctrinated leaders. For a time he was doubtful about whether Mao's success could consolidate the socialist camp, since Mao's efforts at reconciliation with America in the 1930s and 1940s could not make him appear a staunch fighter against imperialism. Stalin continued to maintain diplomatic relations with Chiang's KMT regime up to the end of the Chinese civil war. Though Mao adopted a policy of leaning towards the Soviet Union, it should be noted that he was forced to do so by the Americans' persistently hostile attitudes towards him.

From mid 1949, Sino-Soviet relations developed rapidly. In July 1949, Liu Shaoqi, vice-chairman of the CCP, visited Moscow in order to improve bilateral relations as well as to attempt to secure Soviet economic aid for Chinese economic reconstruction. From December 1949 to February 1950, Chairman Mao was in Moscow at the head of a Chinese delegation. During these meetings, Stalin apologized for his past policy towards the CCP, and the leaders of both countries discussed a wide range of issues, deciding to promote close co-operation between the two countries. Mao Zedong and Stalin signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in February 1950. The treaty paved the way for massive Soviet military and economic assistance to China.

On the question of Korea, in early 1950 Stalin only discussed with Mao Kim's reunification idea in general terms. In supporting Kim in waging his national liberation war, Stalin, influenced by Kim's optimistic strategic analysis, at first played down the possibility of American military intervention, even when Mao raised the possibility. After the Korean War started, Mao also had different opinions from Stalin about Kim's strategy.

But after MacArthur's Inchon landing, when the situation became completely unfavourable to Kim, Stalin immediately became pessimistic. He believed that the United Nations forces' advance could in no way be checked unless the Soviet Union directly intervened. However, that was the last thing he wished to do. He even angrily rejected Krushchev's suggestion of sending a Russian general to organize an effective resistance. He would not run the risk of a direct Soviet Union-United States military confrontation. Yet, he did not want to lose North Korea either.

When Stalin was told, on 2 October, of Mao's decision to send troops to Korea to help Kim, he was most happy that the Chinese had helped to solve his dilemma. Although he doubted Chinese military capability to win a war against the United States, he realized that it would be better for Chinese troops to be involved than the Soviet Red

Army. Therefore, after an exchanges of views with the Chinese leaders, Stalin immediately agreed to provide China with air force support and promised to equip 100 Chinese divisions with Soviet weapons and other war materials – but not free of charge. At that time, Stalin was mainly concerned about the serious Korean situation. It was therefore agreed between the CCP and Stalin in early October that, in the Korean battlefield, the Chinese army would be responsible for the ground while the Soviet air force would be responsible for the air. The date for Chinese troops to cross the Yalu river was originally set at 15 October 1950.⁸⁰

At the conclusion of the CCP special enlarged Politburo meeting on 8 October, just a few days after the United States First Cavalry Division crossed the 38th parallel, the decision to enter the Korean War was therefore made. On the same day, Mao Zedong, in his capacity as chairman of the Revolutionary Military Commission of the Central People's Government, officially issued the command sending the CPV to Korea. In the same order, General Peng Dehuai was named the commander of the CPV.⁸¹

General Peng left Beijing for Shenyang on 8 October to organize his headquarters, and by 11 October, Peng's first eight divisions (around 80,000) were ready to cross the border.⁸²

However, on 12 October, Peng Dehuai suddenly received a telegram from Mao, asking him to postpone all actions, to station in Andong and wait for further instructions. This sudden change was due to unexpected events on the Soviet side. Moscow had first agreed to send its air force to support the Chinese action, but Stalin changed his mind and decided on 10 October to postpone sending it until after the CCP Military Commission issued the order to send the CPV to Korea.⁸³

Stalin was mainly concerned about possible direct military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. For Stalin, to use Soviet air force was too risky, and it appeared to be best for Soviet interests to have MacArthur checked and at the same time avoid a third world war. Also Stalin was worried about the possible acceleration of military confrontation between China and the United States when China entered the war. If Washington decided to bomb Chinese coastal cities or industrial bases, the Soviet Union would have to be involved in support of China because of its treaty obligation – the Sino-Soviet mutual defence treaty had gone into effect a few months before.⁸⁴

Zhou Enlai was immediately sent to Moscow to talk with Stalin secretly on 10 October. Zhou was authorized to inform Stalin that if the Soviet Union postponed sending its air force, the Chinese might

80. From interviews.

81. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 25.

82. Yao Xu, "Peng Dehui's contribution in commanding the CPV in the Korean War," *Research Materials for Party History (Dangshi yanjiu ziliao)*, Issue 1, 1982.

83. From interviews.

84. From interviews.

have to postpone sending troops across the Yalu river simply because the CPV had no confidence in their ability to check MacArthur's march without Soviet air force support.⁸⁵ On 11 October, Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao—who was by then in the Soviet Union for medical treatment—met with Stalin. Yet Stalin only promised to expedite training Chinese pilots and insisted that it would be better if the Soviet Union did not involve its air force in the Korean Peninsula at this time. Stalin then asked Zhou to inform Mao that in this circumstance, “Comrade Kim Il-Sung will set up an exile government in North-east China.”⁸⁶

Between 11 and 13 October, Mao did not sleep for about 60 hours, for he had to make a most difficult decision quickly.⁸⁷ The main reason for his decision to send Chinese troops to Korea was his concern about the security of the newly established regime. However, he was aware that if after he involved China in a military conflict with the most powerful country in the world, China lost the war, the consequence would be even worse. On 13 October, after communicating with Zhou Enlai in Moscow and discussing the issue with other colleagues, Mao finally decided that CPV should go ahead and cross the Yalu, even without Soviet air support.⁸⁸ It seems that Mao felt that if confrontation with the United States was inevitable, it would be better to get into Korea before Kim Il-Sung retreated to China with his government in exile.

Mao sent telegrams to both Peng Dehuai at Andong and Zhou Enlai in Moscow on 13 October, informing them that “after consulting with other comrades on the Politburo, we felt that it would be advantageous for us to send troops to Korea.”⁸⁹ The CCP Central Committee decided that “the Chinese Volunteer Army should cross the Yalu River on 19 October 1950.”⁹⁰

When China did enter the Korean War without Soviet air force support, Stalin was so moved by Mao's self-sacrifice and so impressed by the performance of the CPV that he offered to increase Soviet aid on his own initiative.⁹¹ By late 1950, the Soviet Union had sent two air force divisions (fewer than 200 airjets) to defend the Yalu river bridge and the main transport line 100 kilometres south of the Yalu river on behalf of the CPV. Those Soviet pilots were dressed in CPV uniforms and were instructed to identify themselves as Chinese Russian minority subjects if caught by the enemy.

During the whole Korean War, the Soviet Union provided CPV

85. From interviews.

86. From interviews; this was also released from “Conversation of Chen Yi on April 16, 1964,” cited in Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 22, fn. 4.

87. From interviews.

88. From interviews.

89. From interviews. This was also indicated in Nie Rongzhen, *Memoir*, p. 737: “October 13, Comrade Mao Zedong and the CCP Central Committee reaffirmed the necessity of sending troops to Korea.”

90. See Nie Rongzhen, *Memoir*, p. 737.

91. From interviews.

weapon equipment for more than 60 army divisions and equipped more than 10 air force divisions. In addition, Moscow provided 80 per cent of the ammunition for the CPV. (The CPV used 3 million tons of military materials and 250,000 tons of ammunition during the Korean War.)⁹²

The CCP's Initial Operational Planning

There was a consensus among the top Chinese leaders that the outcome of the initial CPV operation would have a great impact on the morale and confidence of both the army at the front and the people at home. Chinese strategic planning for the war was based on the assumption that the war might be confined to Korea, with some bombardment of the Chinese homeland.⁹³

With the help of General Peng, Mao made several decisions on the initial operational planning which proved crucial to the subsequent development of the Korean War:

1. *On the force size.* Stalin first advised Mao Zedong to deploy only six divisions in the initial stage of the war, for fear that a force larger than that would provoke America to escalate the war beyond control and to use the atomic bomb.⁹⁴

After a careful study of the situation, Mao and Peng doubted the wisdom of the advice. The United Nations force numbered 14 divisions and two brigades (440,000); its first echelon contained 130,000 troops. The CPV would be outnumbered if it followed Stalin's advice, and it would surely be outgunned. Peng was worried that after the first engagement the Yalu river bridges would be demolished and reinforcements might be difficult to send across it. Mao and Peng reached the same conclusion, that all six corps (18 divisions) in the border area must be deployed into Korea to achieve numerical superiority there and assure victory in the initial engagements.⁹⁵ In fact, the first entrance of Chinese troops was made by four full-sized corps and three artillery divisions, totalling 250,000⁹⁶

2. *The secret force deployment.* Mao instructed Peng on the eve of crossing the Yalu that surprise would be a decisive factor in achieving initial victory. Though MacArthur had the means to conduct reconnaissance, his arrogance and complacency prevented objective analysis of the information he got. Surprise could be achieved both because of his miscalculation of China's intention to intervene and the well-disguised Chinese force deployment.

Mao specifically ordered: "The crossing of the Yalu starts from the evening of 19 October between Andong and Jian. To keep it secret, all

92. From interviews.

93. *Selected Works of Chen Yun*, p. 99.

94. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, pp. 25 and 30.

95. See Hu Guangzheng, "Wise decision and great achievement: on decision to enter the Korean War," *Research on Party History* (Dangshiyuanjiu), Issue 1, 1983.

96. See Peng Dehuai, *Memoirs*, p. 324.

crossing should be done in the darkness from dusk till 4 a.m. in the morning.”⁹⁷ He also instructed that there should be a total news blackout regarding the crossing. Peng ordered his forces to avoid main highways in their movements, in an attempt to delay detection by the adversary.⁹⁸

The surprise factor was perfectly achieved. Not until the first large-scale engagement had been made and his forces had been badly mauled, did MacArthur learn about the large size of the Chinese forces.

3. *Offence, not defence.* Before the CPV entered Korea, Mao's operational plan was of a defensive nature. He originally expressed his idea in a telegram to CPV leaders, instructing them, “to establish two to three defence lines north of Pyongyang and Wonsan,” and saying that, “the offensive operation should not be conducted until after the CPV has been armed with Soviet equipment and has had enough training.” He specifically ordered that the CPV should conduct offensive operations on Pyongyang and Wonsan six months after it entered the Korean War.⁹⁹

But, as Whiting has pointed out, when the United Nations forces advanced towards Yalu, “there was no continuous defence line and little direct communication linking the two field headquarters”; “in addition, American reliance upon motorized transport and armoured units left these armies, . . . strung out over long, hazardous mountain roads. Not only were the U.N. forces split in two, but the two part were atomized.”¹⁰⁰ This provided an ideal opportunity for the CPV to stage offensive operations instead of static defensive ones.¹⁰¹ This alteration of strategy changed the whole course of the Korean War.

After the first offensive operation was completed on 5 November 1950, the CPV suddenly disengaged from the United Nations forces. Why did Beijing not commit its full strength to an immediate all-out offensive against those forces? This is another mystery yet to be resolved in the west. Whiting considered several explanations: the need for a greater concentration of forces; the need for a protracted war; and political considerations regarding testing and examining the United Nations' response to China's intervention.¹⁰²

Considering the evidence Whiting then had, his analysis in some respects was well argued, but he overlooked the subtlety of traditional Chinese psychology in conducting war. We can gain a better understanding of this from Peng's later explanation. Peng said:

First, though we achieved success in the first offensive operation, the enemy's main force remained intact. With the main body of the CPV unexposed, it was expected that the enemy would continue to stage an offensive. Second,

97. *Ibid.* p. 30.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 5, pp. 649–52.

100. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 130.

101. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, p. 31.

102. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, pp. 130 and 132.

the enemy had boasted the ability of its airforce to cut off our communication and food supply. This gave us an opportunity to deceive the enemy about our intention. By releasing some POWs, we could give the enemy an impression that we are in short supply and are retreating. Thirdly, the enemy is equipped with air and tank cover, so it would be difficult for us to wipe out the retreating enemy on foot.¹⁰³

In other words, the aim of Peng's disengagement was to conceal his strength, deceive the enemy and prepare for harder blows on MacArthur.

During the three years of the Korean War, the Chinese sent in rotation altogether 25 field corps, 70 artillery divisions, 10 railway engineering divisions, three tank divisions, two public security divisions, 12 air force divisions and 15 engineering regiments into the Korean battlefield. The total number of CPV forces deployed was more than 2.3 million troops, including 66 per cent of the entire field army, 62 per cent of all artillery divisions, 100 per cent of all tank divisions, and 70 per cent of the entire air force that People's Republic of China had at that time.¹⁰⁴ The total casualties of the CPV in the Korean War were 360,000, excluding 20,000 people captured by the United Nations force.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

China's decision to enter the Korean War was made in a risky and uncertain situation with a very complicated historical background. Some of the roots of the decision can be found in the history of modern China, but the relations between the CCP and the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations were more important in laying the groundwork for the decision. When Mao and Truman decided to enter the war, neither was fully prepared, and the consequences seemed uncertain for both of them. Mao had long been psychologically prepared for the possibility, but he certainly was under heavier pressure than Truman, for he was facing a far superior enemy. From the materials now available on the Chinese side, we can see that Chinese participation was neither a long-planned, well-designed operation, nor an action taken as part of the Soviet Union's global expansion. Stalin might have persuaded Mao not to take action if Mao had not reached the conclusion that a Sino-American confrontation was inevitable or if Truman had shown some flexibility in his policy when the CCP took over the mainland. Ideology played an important but not an absolute role in Mao's decision, contrary to the views of most western historians over the past three decades.

It should be noted that Whiting's comprehensive study of China's decision to enter the war, and some of his inferences and conclusions,

103. Yao Xu, *From Yalu*, pp. 39–40.

104. From interviews.

105. From interviews.

were closer to the truth than those of most other western analysts. Considering the limited materials he had then from the Chinese side, probably no one could have done better than he did. But, as mentioned above, when analysing an action made by China, a country with a history unlike that of any other nation in the world, no single factor could be regarded as the roots or motivation behind it. In Whiting's book, it is not difficult to find evidence that he was deeply biased ideologically, and overlooked many important factors. He was influenced in his inferences by some key assumptions, such as the one that patron-client relations existed between Stalin and Mao; this certainly narrowed his angle of view and limited the possibilities he could explore.

From what we have discussed, it is fairly clear that the reasons why China entered the Korean War were primarily security concerns. Fearing a growing military threat from the United States, and believing that Sino-American military confrontation was inevitable, CCP leaders maintained that it might be wise for them to select the time and place. When American troops, despite Chinese warnings, crossed the 38th parallel and marched towards the Yalu river, the People's Republic of China entered the conflict in support of North Korea's forces. Over a brief period, the Korean War turned into a United States-China military conflict. Retrospectively, if the CCP and the Truman Administration had better understood each other's intention, this tragedy could certainly have been avoided.