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To cite this article: Donggil Kim (2010) Stalin and the Chinese Civil War , Cold War History, 10:2, 185-202

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682741003619447>



Published online: 21 May 2010.



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The Crucial Issues of the Early Cold War

Stalin and the Chinese Civil War

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This article attempts to resolve the historical controversy over Stalin's attitude and action toward the Chinese Communist Party in early 1949. It specifically deals with the question of whether Stalin had indeed persistently tried to persuade the CCP not to cross the Yangtze River, a move that would have resulted in a divided China. With the aid of newly discovered telegrams sent to Moscow by the Soviet embassy in China, this article reinterprets the telegrams exchanged between Stalin and Mao Zedong in January 1949. On the basis of these, this article proposes a new analysis as to whether or not Stalin actually dissuaded the river-crossing; asserting that Stalin's telegram and the so-called 'coalition government' urged by Anastas Mikoyan in late January 1949, lend strong support for the argument in favour of Stalin's dissuasion of the river-crossing.

Introduction

Stalin's role in both stimulating and hindering the Chinese revolution has prompted much debate, but few controversies provoked such heated discussions as those which erupted in the 1980s over whether Joseph Stalin had in fact tried to dissuade the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) from crossing the Yangtze River.¹

The question of the Yangtze River Crossing is crucial to understanding both Soviet global strategies and Sino-Soviet relations for the early Cold War period.²

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The publication of new telegrams by Russian scholar Sergei Tikhvinsky concerning the peace talks between the KMT (Kuomintang) and the CCP in January 1949 have added much breadth to these discussions, but have not resolved the matter conclusively.³ Most Russian and some Chinese scholars have argued that Stalin never attempted to prevent the river-crossing. These arguments are based either on the fact that there is an absence of definitive evidence showing that Stalin did so; on the information disclosed in Stalin's telegram of 14 January 1949; or purely on the assumption that Stalin would have gladly welcomed a unified Communist China.⁴ In 1995, however Brian Murray, based on the KMT foreign ministry records of Russian diplomat Nikolai Roshchin's activity in China, along with new Soviet diplomatic documents, has maintained that the Soviet Union in fact preferred to see China divided at the Yangtze River.⁵ This article lends support to this second view.

On 2 January 1979, an article entitled 'We should respect the truth and think independently: recalling an amiable talk by Chairman Mao in 1957' by Wang Fangming was published in *People's Daily*. Wang Fangming relays his account of Mao Zedong's words as follows:

'Up until to the year of 1949, when we were about to cross the Yangtze River, there was still someone who prevented us from doing so. It was said that we absolutely could not cross the river. If we did, the United States would dispatch troops and China would be in the situation similar to the "Northern and Southern Dynasties"'. Chairman Mao continued: 'I did not listen to them. When we crossed the river, no intervention of U.S. troops happened, and the "Northern and Southern Dynasties" did not appear. Later I met the person [e.g., Stalin] who dissuaded our river-crossing. His first words were "Winners should not be blamed"'. The Chairman continued, 'He did not reproach us for not taking his advice. On the contrary, he acknowledged that we were the winners.'⁶

This was not the first occasion on which Mao Zedong had referred to Stalin's many impositions upon the Chinese revolution. As early as 25 March 1949 – soon after Stalin's personal envoy to China (Anastas Mikoyan) returned to Moscow – Mao said in the CCP headquarters at Xibaipo that 'some of our international friends hold a doubtful attitude towards the victory of China's War of Liberation, advising us to stop and together with Jiang Jieshi establish "Northern and Southern Dynasties" with the Yangtze River as the demarcation line'.⁷ Not long after this statement, Mao ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to cross the Yangtze River.

More than seven years later, Stalin's doubtful attitude was again troubling Mao. On 25 April 1956, in his report 'On the Ten Significant Relationships' to the enlarged session of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, the topic of the river crossing again came up. Mao, reflecting on Stalin's legacy, said: 'Stalin has wronged China: Early in the War of Liberation he prevented us from revolution, arguing that if the war broke out the Chinese nation would be in danger of total destruction. After the war broke out, he remained distrustful of us. When we had finally won all the battles, he even suspected that our victory of being like that of Tito'.⁸

Two years later, Mao expressed even more animosity toward Stalin, this time conveying his displeasure to Pavel Yudin (the Soviet ambassador to China) on 22 July 1958: 'You have continually distrusted the Chinese people. Stalin did not trust us very much. He considered us to be a second Tito, a backward nation!'⁹ Mao Zedong frankly expressed his discontent many times.

His counterparts in the CCP leadership reflected Mao's analysis as well, using the same historical analogies. In 1955, while receiving Liu Xiao (Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union) and his wife Zhang Yi, Zhou Enlai commented:

On the eve of the river-crossing, Mikoyan came to Xibaipo from Moscow on behalf of Stalin. His main purpose was to understand the situation of China's revolution and to listen to our opinions. At that time, we were in a very favorable position both militarily and politically. We were preparing to march southward, cross the river, and liberate the whole country. The Soviet Union held different opinions and advised us to put an end to the civil war. Actually they planned to establish 'Northern and Southern Dynasties', thereby creating two Chinas.¹⁰

Stalin's attempt to prevent the river-crossing was stressed repeatedly throughout the discussions held by the CCP leadership and formed an important aspect of their growing resentment toward the Soviet Union in the 1950s. The factual basis of their resentment and regrets will now be explored.

Evidence supporting the 'Dissuasion from the River-Crossing' argument

Statements of the Soviet Ambassador to China, Nikolai Roschin

In 1948, the Guomindang regime remained in Nanjing, suffering from consecutive military defeats in the North but still enjoying formal Soviet recognition. At this time the Soviet ambassador to China, Roschin, spent long hours in discussion with various Guomindang policymakers in Nanjing, including a six-hour conversation with Peng Zhaoxian, the new KMT minister of the interior. Given the porous state of the Guomindang in mid-1948, the essence of the conversation quickly made its way into American hands and was relayed by United States' ambassador John Leighton Stuart to Secretary of State George C. Marshall on 15 July 1948. In the conversation on the Chinese Civil War, Roschin first urged that 'the war be brought to an end for the sake of all concerned'. Peng also sensed a growing distrust from the Soviet Union toward the Chinese Communists, an attitude in which the United States would take particular interest. US Ambassador Stuart, in his report to Marshall, reached three conclusions with regard to the conversation: 1. '[The] Soviets are seriously concerned by their estimate of the extent to which American aid will strengthen the National Government'; 2. The Soviet Union longed for an ending to the GMD-CCP hostilities 'before the Communists suffer any major defeat'; 3. 'The Soviets on various occasions during the last 2 or 3 years have been known to express doubts, and at times even scorn, for the Chinese Communists'. Finally, Stuart maintained that 'there will be other Soviet approaches to the Chinese Government on the basis of Soviets assistance as a mediator either singly or jointly with the U.S.'¹¹

On 1 December 1948, Stuart again reported to Secretary Marshall, stating that 'a truce or a resumption of peace negotiations' would be very likely. Stuart continued that the Soviet ambassador, Roschin, would put forth his mediation suggestions again. The basis for Roschin's mediation was that the KMT ruled the southern part of the Yangtze River while the Chinese Communists controlled the northern part, and that the United States should recognise the Soviet Union's special privileges in Manchuria.¹² These are the first detailed conditions put forth by the Soviet Union for allowing the CCP and the KMT 'to rule separate banks of the Yangtze River'.

As Roschin was suggesting proposals for mediation, as a Soviet diplomat, he was not only reflecting Stalin's goals but also following the basic strategic framework of the Soviet leadership. In late spring of 1948, Roschin had expressed his deep concerns to Chakravarty, Chief of the Indian Mission. In the conversation, the Soviet ambassador mentioned that 'a huge communist state on Russia's eastern frontier would create serious problems for his government', implying that 'because of its vast extent and huge population China would prove to be "indigestible" even to the communist appetite'. Chakravarty concluded Roschin's remarks by saying 'let the Americans pour all the money they wish into China – it will only make them weaker'; he added that 'the present communist successes would not necessarily serve to further Russian expansion but indeed might ultimately work to weaken the Soviet position in the East'.¹³ Thus, the notion of the Far East as an abyss for American resources and a drain on the US posture in Europe was certainly shared by the Soviet diplomat.

On 4 January 1949, Zhang Zhizhong, high ranking official in KMT, having assumed a democratic posture and with a friendly attitude towards the CCP, told Fu Jingbo (Stuart's personal advisor), that the Soviets had already advised the CCP to stop their march along the Yangtze River. Zhang noted that the CCP had turned a deaf ear to [Soviet] advice and made up their mind to continue with the war.¹⁴ Roschin's above comments to Chakravarty together with Zhang's comment clearly indicate that the Soviet Union was apprehensive with regard to the CCP crossing the Yangtze River. While these comments were not directly relayed to the CCP, Roschin repeatedly expressed the USSR's firm support for peace talks and mediation between the KMT and CCP. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the CCP leadership was totally unaware of Roschin's attitude.

Roschin's statements, however, have come under scrutiny from Chinese scholars. For instance, Chinese scholar Xue Xiantian has asserted that Roschin – due to his duplicity as both diplomat and intelligence officer – by falsely suggesting that the Soviet Union desired to act as mediator in the Chinese Civil War, may have intended to ease the concerns of the United States, thus decreasing the likelihood of an American intervention and so allowing time for the Chinese Communists to continue with unification.¹⁵

Such an assertion though appears to be false, judging from documents cited in the work of Russian Scholar Andrei Ledovsky. In May 1948, the Soviet foreign ministry delivered instructions to the Soviet embassy in China. In the instructions, the foreign ministry specifically stressed that 'the position of the Soviet Union towards the peace

talks in China would be cautious. All diplomats, especially the Ambassador, would be cautious and could not deviate from official position; i.e. [the Soviet Union] could not interfere with China's civil affairs'.¹⁶ Considering such strict instructions, it is hard to imagine that Soviet diplomats, especially an ambassador, would deviate from the USSR's official position in a conversation with officials of the National Government. It is thus not reasonable to believe Roschin's statements to be an intentional scattering of false information, as some scholars have asserted. It is more plausible that Roschin's statements were a clear reflection of Stalin's intentions and that he shared the strategic framework of the Soviet leadership.

Telegrams between Stalin and Mao Zedong

At the end of 1948, the KMT government launched a peace offensive to buy time to regroup its struggling military. On New Year's Day, Jiang Jieshi published a New Year's message, proclaiming that as long as the war came to an end and the peace talks resumed, he would selflessly step down from his position out of respect for the country's wishes.

Jiang's apparent abdication lent momentum to the KMT push for peace talks. On 8 January 1949, the National Government handed over notes to the United States, USSR, Great Britain and France respectively, wishing for 'any suggestions on resuming peace in China as soon as possible' by any government. The National Government was ready to initiate peace talks with the CCP via mediation through other countries.¹⁷

On 10 January 1949, Stalin sent a telegram to Mao Zedong, informing the CCP leader of his intention to accept the National Government's mediation request. In the telegram Stalin pointed out that 'the suggestion of the Nanjing Government was inspired by the Americans', and that 'the aim of the proposal was to present the Nanjing government as the advocate of ending the war and establishing a peaceful settlement, while the Communist Party of China would be presented as the advocate of the continuation of war, thus if the CCP directly reject peace negotiations with Nanjing it would mean that the CCP insisted on a continuation of war'.¹⁸ Therefore Stalin exerted pressure on Mao Zedong apparently by saying that 'if the CCP refused the proposal for peace talks, people would have the impression that the CCP is belligerent'. Having warned the CCP against opposing the peace talks, Stalin continued:

We would like to respond to [the proposal] as follows: the Soviet Union has always been and is in favor of the termination of war and establishment of peace in China. However, before accepting the mediation proposal, we would like to know whether the other party, the CCP, is willing to accept the Soviet Union as a mediator. Therefore, the Soviet Union would like a CCP answer concerning the peace talks, and to get the CCP's approval for the USSR acting as mediator.

This statement clearly shows that Stalin was ready to accept the National Government's proposal and force the CCP into agreeing as well. Stalin also suggested to the CCP that 'the Chinese Communist Party agrees to negotiate with the National Government but could not allow those war criminals who started the Chinese Civil

War to participate'. The CCP called for direct discussions with the National Government but did not want any foreign powers to mediate. The CCP particularly felt that any countries that had dispatched troops or ships to participate in the civil war, or those that had opposed the PLA, could not be allowed to be a mediator. Stalin's statement intended to exclude the US from the peace negotiations and assure exclusive consideration of the Soviet Union as a mediator. At the end of the telegram, citing as a reason consideration for the peace talks between the KMT and the CCP, Stalin recommended that Mao's visit to Moscow be postponed.¹⁹

A day later, Stalin realised that the wording of his first telegram had not been clear enough. He sent a second telegram to Mao Zedong, explaining further that 'our purpose for the draft of your response to Guomindang proposal is to undermine the peace talks. Obviously, the KMT will not agree to hold peace talks without foreign countries – particularly the United States – acting as mediator'. Stalin continued: 'It is also clear that the KMT will not consent to peace talks while Jiang Jieshi and other war criminals are prevented from attending the meeting'. However, he still pointed out that if 'the CCP is in favor of peace talks, it could exonerate the CCP from blame in continuing the war. In this way, the KMT becomes the criminal who broke the peace talks'.²⁰ To a certain extent, Stalin already sensed that the KMT would not give up the peace talks in any case. This telegram shows that Stalin still hoped that the CCP would not turn down peace talks.

Was Stalin really willing to act as a mediator in the peace talks? While misunderstandings easily arise due to differences in the wording of the two telegrams, in regard to this matter Mikoyan confirmed Stalin's desire to mediate. Mikoyan's testimony that the 'the USSR hoped the CCP would receive and agree to the National Government's proposal and that the Soviet Union could obtain the CCP's agreement in her serving as mediator'.²¹ There is no doubt that Stalin strongly hoped for the mediation.

On 12 January, the National Government's ambassador to the Soviet Union, Fu Bingchang, notified Molotov personally that while the Chinese declaration had welcomed foreign assistance with the establishment of peace talks, 'the friendly assistance rendered by the four governments must not simultaneously occur. If the Soviet Union is willing to offer separate aid on the peace talks between the National Government and the CCP, the National Government will be greatly appreciative'.²² Fu Bingchang's statement dovetailed with Stalin's ideas of the Soviet Union being the only mediator and so dominating the peace-making between the KMT and the CCP.

On 12 January, not yet having received Stalin's second telegram, Mao Zedong replied to Stalin, expressing his resentment. Mao's telegram contained a drafted note that the USSR was asked to send as a response to the National Government. Mao asked Stalin to convey that:

The Soviet Government used to be and has always been willing to see a peaceful, democratic and united China. However, achieving China's peace, democracy and unity is a matter for the Chinese people themselves. Based on the principle of non-interference into other countries' internal affairs, the Soviet Government considers it unacceptable to take part in the mediation between the two parties in China's civil war.

The telegram also pointed out that the National Government's proposal for peace talks was, at its heart, 'a swindle', and stressed the imminent 'nationwide victory of the PLA' and the 'inevitable collapse of the KMT'. Under such circumstances, only countries with 'the purpose of preserving the KMT regime' and 'hoping to support the Nanjing government' should accept the suggestion for 'peace talks'. Mao went so far as to hint that to accept the proposal of the National Government was, in effect, 'to stand against the PLA', citing the rising tide of the 'masses discontented with the KMT'. Mao said that a cessation of hostilities could disappoint those who were 'hoping for the PLA's rapid victory'. Mao further stated that 'in order to bring the Chinese people true peace as soon as possible', the Central Committee of CCP was preparing to send out an ultimatum to 'call for the Nanjing Government's unconditional surrender'.²³ Mao's telegram shows without a doubt that not only would the CCP refuse mediation from the United States, Great Britain or France, but that the CCP would not accept mediation from the Soviet Union either.

At the same time, in order to completely bury the drive toward mediation, Mao Zedong deliberately disclosed to the United States that, in order to induce the United States to rapidly abandon its participation in the mediation, neither the CCP nor the Soviet Union would participate. Mao reasoned that if the United States knew both the CCP and the USSR were against them, the peace talks surely would not be carried out.²⁴ While one might assume that Mao Zedong would conceal this tactic from Stalin, in fact Mao did not avoid mentioning it. In his telegram to Stalin on 14 January, Mao bluntly stated that 'several days ago, the Americans had already sounded out our attitude – whether we would like to hold the peace talks without the 43 war criminals'. Mao continued, 'It is obvious that this condition alone, that is to hold the talks without war criminals, is not good enough to expose the KMT's conspiring within the peace talks'.²⁵

Mao Zedong's strategy rapidly took effect. On 13 January 1949, Ambassador Stuart delivered the US reply to the request of the Nanjing government for mediation.²⁶ The US construed that unless 'all four powers were willing act in concert' and that the CCP was willing to participate, mediation would not produce any substantial result.²⁷

On 14 January, Mao Zedong took the decisive step, and declared eight conditions for peace talks. These conditions were aimed against the five conditions made in advance by Jiang Jieshi in his proposal for the peace talks released on 1 January 1949. The eight conditions were absolutely unacceptable to the National Government. Mao Zedong himself confessed it frankly: on 15 January, in a drafted telegram to Northeast Bureau of the CCP, he pointed out that 'our eight conditions aimed at Jiang's five conditions', and 'the two parties' conditions are unacceptable to each other and that the war will certainly continue until the end'.²⁸ Stalin, now with no leeway on the mediation proposal, was forced to retract his first telegraph.

In his 14 January telegram, Stalin explained to Mao that:

[There is] no doubt that the suggestions for peace talks by the Nanjing Government and the Americans were a deceptive policy. Their purpose was not to establish real peace but to have an armistice with the CCP. They just want to stop CCP military activities so that they can buy time to breathe, regroup the KMT armies, consolidate

their defense on the southern part of the Yangtze River, and transport weapons and equipment from the United States to reinforce their strength. After that, they will break up the armistice agreement and launch attacks on the PLA. . . . There can be two ways to cope with the ploy of both the Nanjing government and the United States. The first is to directly turn down the Nanjing Government's proposal for peace talks, but this means that, first, we hand over the banner of peace – an important weapon – to the National Government. Second, let them stigmatize the CCP as the advocate of the civil war and eulogize the KMT as the advocate of peace, and third reject of Nanjing's proposal which offers the chance for the United States to fabricate public opinions in Europe and America, saying that the CCP does not want peace and that the only way to establish peace in China is to organize big power intervention.²⁹

Stalin's position in the telegram of 14 January was completely different from that of 10 January. It went without saying that this change resulted from Mao Zedong's strong opposition to mediation.

When on 17 January, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyshinsky informed the National Government that the Soviet Union would not be participating in the peace talks, the CCP–Soviet battle over peace talks came to a close.³⁰

Stalin's attempt to mediate peace talks left a deep impression upon Mao Zedong, showing that Stalin intended to put an end to the Chinese revolution. The parlance of 'ruling China separately across the River' and the 'Northern and Southern Dynasties', which later emerged in Mao and Zhou Enlai's recollections, all came from this one impression.

On 19 January, 1949, Mao Zedong stressed again that 'most importantly, we cannot allow any intervention by foreign countries or the United Nations on the internal affairs of China. Since China is an independent nation, our internal affairs should be solved by the Chinese people and government. If any foreigners try to mediate in China's civil war, we should refuse it immediately.'³¹

In spite of the CCP's distaste for a Soviet-brokered mediation, the Soviets still continued to urge the CCP to pursue a coalition government with the KMT.

The 'Coalition Government' suggested by Mikoyan

The Soviet strategy to prevent the CCP's marching southward can also be read from the actions of Mikoyan during his visit to CCP headquarters Xibaipo in late January 1949. At Xibaipo, Stalin's envoy, Mikoyan, exerted pressure upon Mao Zedong in the hope of swiftly setting up a coalition government. Mikoyan's report, covering his visit from 30 January to 8 February 1949, mentioned clearly that there were, at that time, different opinions concerning two specific questions between the Soviet Union and the CCP. The first was whether or not all political parties except the CCP should disband after the victory of Chinese revolution. On this question Stalin had argued that 'the CCP, while maintaining its leading position, should cooperate with them [smaller parties] to fight against Chinese reactionaries and the imperialist powers'. Furthering his vision of a multi-party Chinese system, Stalin noted that 'If possible, some

delegates from these parties should be allowed to join the people's democratic government. This government should be declared a coalition government so as to extend its foundation among the people and isolate the imperialist powers and their Kuomintang running dogs as well.³² Stalin was indeed correct that a number of smaller parties remained active and unconsolidated under the banner of the CCP, but Mao bridled at the suggestion. The other question was related to Soviet mediation in the peace talks.³³

Differing opinions remain with regard to the Soviet attitude toward the coalition government. As put forward by Mikoyan, there was no great divergence between the CCP and the USSR in their concept of an overarching coalition government with the CCP as its head. However, with regard to the deadline in setting up such a coalition government, huge gaps remained between the CCP and Soviet positions. First, although Mikoyan advised Mao Zedong to cross the Yangtze River and to take control of Nanjing and Shanghai as soon as possible, Mikoyan following the directions of the central committee of the USSR's Communist Party, urged the CCP to 'not delay in setting up China's revolutionary government on the basis of a coalition; and the sooner, the better'. Mikoyan stated that 'after occupying Nanjing or Shanghai, you [e.g., the CCP] should "immediately" declare the founding of a revolutionary government . . . When the government is set up, you are no longer a guerilla group but a government. This will facilitate your struggle against Jiang Jieshi'.³⁴ On the surface, Mikoyan's advice bespoke a kind consideration for the CCP. However, his implicit intention was to encourage the CCP to 'immediately' declare a new coalition government after occupying Nanjing or Shanghai, forcing an end to the 'straight-victory liberation war' and placing their focus on preparations for setting up a coalition government. While Mikoyan was putting forth these suggestions, Li Zongren's National Government had already been moved to Guangzhou. Did Mikoyan then want the CCP to set up a coalition government with Li Zongren or with some other regional warlord? Mao immediately grasped the meaning of setting up a coalition government following the taking of Nanjing or Shanghai. He understood this would drastically hinder the victory of the Chinese Revolution. In response to Mikoyan's suggestion Mao Zedong bluntly stated that 'we don't need to hurry, we still need one or two years to take complete control of China both politically and economically'. Mao continued:

We should not rush the establishment of a government . . . having no government is more convenient to our movement . . . If we have a coalition government it would imply that the responsibility of CCP actions would be extended to include other parties, this would make matters more complicated . . . We are now acting like a revolutionary committee, free from other parties.³⁵

Mao Zedong completely rejected Mikoyan's suggestion. Before Mikoyan came to Xibaipo Mao Zedong had already anticipated that Mikoyan would bring forward the question of a 'coalition government'. Stalin, in his telegram on 14 January, had already mentioned the setting up of a coalition government,³⁶ so Mao Zedong had made sound preparations for Mikoyan's suggestions. Considering his response, it is clear

that the CCP leadership considered Mikoyan's suggestion of setting up an immediate 'coalition government' as a hindrance to victory of the Chinese revolution.

Zhou Enlai later verified as much, saying that 'On the eve of the river-crossing, Mikoyan came from Moscow to Xibaipo on behalf of Stalin to request us [the CCP] to stop the civil war. They [the Soviets] were actually intending to create "Northern and Southern Dynasties" or "two Chinas"'. The author believes that Zhou Enlai's comments were in fact a reference to the setting up of a coalition government.

Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, being most familiar with the situation, are the best witnesses. They had mentioned more than once Stalin's opposition to China's desire to cross the Yangtze River and his intention of creating 'northern and southern dynasties'. Their words remain a powerful testimony to Stalin's attitudes toward the Chinese Revolution at that time. To deny that Stalin had attempted to persuade the CCP from the crossing the Yangtze simply because of a lack of written proof is not credible.³⁷

Reasons for Stalin's dissuading the CCP from the crossing the Yangtze

Stalin's fear of a United States military intervention

If indeed Stalin was so intent on preventing the CCP from crossing the Yangtze River at such a critical stage of China's civil war, his motivation bears consideration. During the latter half of 1948, China's domestic situation underwent a fundamental change, a change which coincided with the intensification of the Cold War in Europe. Stalin's blockade of Berlin unexpectedly encountered fierce counter-measures from the United States. It was rumored that on 28 June 1948 President Truman ratified a measure releasing 60 bombers to the European theater. Truman's actions, combined with the very real US atomic threat, exerted great influence on the subsequent foreign policies of the Soviet Union.³⁸ Moreover, as the Berlin Blockade progressed, Stalin witnessed the immense power of the United States which dispatched thousands of planes to Berlin, dropping air-parcels and even airlifting drinking water.³⁹ If the United States would take such action to save a half-destroyed city in an occupied country, Stalin could only imagine what the United States would do if China – the largest country in Asia – were to be controlled by Stalin's ostensible ally, the CCP.

Believing that Soviet national security was facing new threats from the United States, the weak Soviet foreign policy towards the United States had aroused strong dissatisfaction in Moscow's diplomatic circles. This dissatisfaction began to emerge in November of that year when the USSR ambassador to the United States, Nikolai Novikov, was accused of submitting a false report on American preparations for war with the USSR.⁴⁰ The ambassador's subsequent dismissal in 1948 can of course be seen as the result of the USSR's search for a scapegoat for a series of failures in its dealings with the United States; however, on the other hand the dismissal can also be seen as indicative of the extreme sensitivity the Soviet leadership harboured concerning threats from the United States.

Under such circumstances, the Soviet embassy in China frequently reported the possibility of a United States military intervention in China. On 23 January 1948, based on the 'Agreement between the United States and China Regarding Relief Assistance to China' and the 'Naval Treaty between China and the U.S.A.', signed on 27 October and 8 December 1947 respectively, Puhlov, high-ranking official of the Soviet Union embassy to China, asserted that 'the United States already has anticipated the collapse of Jiang Jieshi's regime'. In response to the coming collapse, Puhlov stated, the US has 'prepared its armed forces for an invasion of China'. The report emphasised that the United States' Marine Corps had already landed in China and had 'explicitly trained the Japanese landing forces in Taiwan'. This report drew the conclusion that 'since the "general" financial and other material "aids" provided by the United States are not enough to save Jiang Jieshi, the United States imperialists are planning to take military invasive actions in China'.⁴¹ This opinion was restated in April 1948, in Ambassador Roschin's cable to the Soviet foreign ministry. Roschin warned, 'Considering that Jiang Jieshi is in great danger, the United States imperialists are taking a series of measures to save and buttress the regime of Jiang Jieshi. Their essential goal is to beat and destroy the democratic power [the CCP], enslave China, and turn China into a military base to oppose the Soviet Union'.⁴² Such dramatic prognoses would play into Soviet calculations when the subject of CCP-KMT peace talks again arose in late 1948 and early 1949.

When the United States appeared to stop aid to Jiang Jieshi's beleaguered regime in late 1948, Malukhin, a third secretary at the Soviet embassy in Nanjing, made the following analysis: 'the U.S.' scaling back of aid to the KMT was intended to force the CCP to accept the peace proposition under the principle of mutual concession'. The United States, however, speculating that the CCP would not align with a KMT-led coalition government, hoped to suppress the CCP completely by uniting 'the legitimate government and the warlords'.⁴³ It was the belief of the Soviet embassy in China that if the CCP did not join the KMT-led allied government; the United States would not sit by and simply watch the CCP's victory but instead launch a military intervention.

These reports undoubtedly had great influence on Stalin's policy toward China. In a telegram to Mao Zedong on 14 January 1949, Stalin mentioned that if the CCP refused the peace talks, it 'would offer the chance for the United States to fabricate public opinion in Europe and America. They would say that the CCP does not want to make peace and that the only way to build peace in China is to organize the big powers to intervene, just like what they did to Russia during the four years between 1918 and 1921'.⁴⁴ Stalin apparently believed that the KMT-CCP peace talks and a ceasefire would remove any pretext for a US military intervention in China.

Stalin's fears of American intervention in China were expressed again on the eve of the river-crossing incident in April 1949. Stalin, worrying about US interference, specifically reminded Mao Zedong that there will be an 'increased danger of the landing of Anglo-American troops in the rear of the main PLA forces marching to the South'.⁴⁵ In spite of its considerable victories over KMT-led forces in 1948, Stalin nevertheless tended to consider CCP military capability too weak.⁴⁶ Chinese Marshall

Nie Rongzhen also stated that Stalin, lacking confidence in the military power of the Chinese Communists, 'was somewhat like the ancient man of Qi who was worried that the sky might fall at anytime'. Nie Rongzhen also had the impression that Mikoyan had doubts concerning the PLA's capability to pursue its offensive drive due to recent heavy losses.⁴⁷

According to the First Secretary at the Soviet embassy in China, Stalin and his advisors seemed to feel that in the event that the United States were to send even one or two divisions to China, the PLA would certainly be defeated.⁴⁸ In January 1949, although a tremendous shift in power had occurred between the KMT and CCP forces, Stalin's position still would not change. Stalin's communications with Mao clearly indicate Stalin's heightened apprehension regarding the possibility of a United States intervention, and also reveal, at least in part, the basis for his attempts to leverage Mao into complying with the peace talks.

Stalin's strong sense of caution towards the United States had an influence not only on the internal conditions of the Chinese civil war, but also shaped his attitude toward the Korean Peninsula. On 7 March 1949, Kim Il-sung, prime minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, met with Stalin in Moscow, asking the head of the world communist movement for permission to attack the Republic of Korea. However Stalin refused his request with the excuse that the United States' military would have no choice but to intervene because US troops were still stationed in South Korea.⁴⁹ From this, we can see very clearly that Stalin's global strategy at this time was to avoid as much as possible a confrontation with the United States.

To focus American attention on China

Historically, Russia had confronted four fundamental security threats, three of which came from Europe and only one stemming from Asia. These four threats were: first, the invasion of Mongolia; second, Napoleon's attack on Russia; third, World War I; and fourth, Germany's invasion during World War II. Russia had paid a high price for its lack of preparedness in each of these conflicts.⁵⁰ Since Russia had suffered from many European threats throughout its history, and with the removal of Japan as a power in Asia that could seriously threaten Soviet security, Stalin after World War II was naturally more concerned with threats stemming from Europe. The nature of the Cold War in Europe also had a tremendous influence on Soviet policy in East Asia.

The Cold War intensified after the Berlin crisis in the summer of 1948. In March 1948, the 'Treaty of Brussels' came into being. On 4 September of that year, this Treaty turned into the Western United Defense Organisation and in April 1949 the organisation was reformed into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The emergence of NATO represented unprecedented danger for the security of the Soviet Union. Thus, eliminating security dangers in Europe became Stalin's priority. Although at the time the Soviet Union was in possession of a superb military, in terms of total national power there was no comparison between the Soviet Union and United States.⁵¹ The United States alone was too much for the USSR to confront, but the gap

between the two camps would be even more dramatic if the economic power of the Western European countries – such as Britain, France, and West Germany – were added to that of the United States. For this reason, the USSR needed to find other regions that could divert United States attention and act as a drain on its material resources.

Since the civil war between the KMT and CCP broke out, China had become an abyss into which the United States would pour material resources and money.⁵² From the perspective of Soviet global security strategy, China was an immensely important region in offering strategic benefits to the USSR. If China maintained its state of division and, thus, the United States' kept providing resources and attention to the KMT, it would surely accord with the USSR's overall strategy. Reinforcing China's strategic role to the Soviet Union, Stalin on several occasions explained the regional duties of the CCP. In the summer of 1949, Stalin explained to Liu Shaoqi, the head of the CCP delegation: 'From now on the Soviet Union will take up the task of revolutionary aid toward the West while the CCP takes responsibility for the East'.⁵³ In the spring of 1950, Stalin emphasised autonomy when he was meeting with Korea's Prime Minister Kim Il-sung in Moscow. Stalin stated that, if necessary, 'Korea should not expect the USSR to take part in the war because the USSR had to cope with other places, especially the West, which was a tougher task'.⁵⁴

Stalin's hopes for keeping the United States tied up in Asia and diverting American attention away from Europe is again clearly represented in Stalin's statements regarding developments in the Korean War. Soon after the outbreak of the Korean War, Stalin sent a telegram to the Czech Communist Klement Gottwald, stating with great satisfaction: 'clearly, the United States has transferred its attention from Europe to the Far East. From the perspective of world power balances, does all this have any benefit to us? Of course it does'.⁵⁵ Unrest in the Far East would draw concern from the United States, thus giving the Soviet Union considerable leverage to move ahead with its main goals on the Western front. With regard to Stalin's desire to avert American attention toward Asia, few documents state Stalin's strategic goals with such clarity as his telegram to Gottwald.

Conclusion

Perhaps however, one need not rely exclusively on new documents or on Mao's complaints to assert that Stalin's naked self-interest trumped the Soviet leader's desire to aid his revolutionary allies in Asia. Historically, Stalin had more than once pursued benefits for the Soviet Union while sacrificing the security and well-being of the Chinese people and the CCP. In order to avoid war, the Soviet Union had signed a neutrality pact with Japan on 13 April 1941.⁵⁶ After Hitler invaded the USSR on 22 June 1941, Stalin, fearing that his already immense territorial losses could be compounded by a Japanese assault, asked the CCP to engage Japanese forces in large-scale tactical offensives in North China without taking into consideration the CCP's actual strength.⁵⁷ The Soviet Union's self-interest was paramount in its decisions

regarding Soviet foreign policy, and Stalin would help Asian revolutionary movements on the condition that such revolutions would have clear benefits to Soviet interests.

Stalin's desire for a so-called 'northern and southern dynasties' system for China could provide numerous benefits to the Soviet Union. First, it could avoid American military intervention. Second, division could pin down American material and military resources in China. And finally, it would be able to ensure the various privileges in China obtained from the Yalta Agreement. A divided China, from the perspective of the Soviet Union, would kill three birds with one stone.

Notes

- [1] Qu xing, 'Sulian zai xinzhongguo jianguo qianhou de duihua zhengce'; Qu xing, '1949 nian sugong lingdao ganyu zhongguo genming de yige zuozheng'; Liu Xiao, 'Chushi sulian'; Yu Zhan and Zhang Guangyou, 'Guanyu sidalin zeng fou quanzu woguo dujiang de tansuo'; Xiang Qing, 'Guanyu sidalin quanzu jiefang dajun guojiang zhi wojian'; Liao Gailong, 'Kangri zhanzheng houqi he jiefang zhanzheng shiqi sulian yu zhongguo geming guanxi'; Garver, 'New Light on Sino-Soviet Relations'.
- [2] In 1947 with the proclamation of the Marshall Plan, the Cold War began in actual and became further intensified following the Soviet initiated Berlin Blockade in 1948. Under such circumstances, insistence by Chinese Communist Party leadership that the Soviet Union had objected to the Crossing of the Yangtze River comes as a complete surprise to us.
- [3] Sergei Tikhvinsky, ex-Soviet diplomat to China during the 1940s, disclosed six telegrams exchanged between Stalin and Mao Zedong regarding the issue of peace talks in January 1949. The information disclosed is as follows: Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong (10 January 1949), Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong (11 January 1949), Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin (13 January 1949), Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong (14 January 1949), Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin (14 January 1949). Tikhvinsky, 'Perepiska I.V. Stalina s Mao Zedunom v Yanvare 1949 goda'.
- [4] Goncharov interview with Kovalev; Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, 42–3; Yu Zhan and Zhang Guangyou, 'Guanyu sidalin zeng fou quanzu woguo dujiang de tansuo', 56–8; Xue Xiantian, 'Huajiang er zhi de fengyuan'.
- [5] Murray, 'Stalin, the Cold War, and the Division of China'.
- [6] Wang Fangming, 'Yao shishi qiushi, dulisikao', 3.
- [7] Editorial group of the Historical Chronicle of the Party, CCP Central Documentary Research Department, 'Zhonggong dangshi dashi nianbiao'shuoming(4)', 13.
- [8] Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, *Mao Zedong zhuan: 1949–1976*, Vol. 1, 500; Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu huiyi Mao Zedong*, 396.
- [9] Pei Jianzhang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, 226; CCP Central Documentary Research Department, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, 322–33; For an alternate English translation, see Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*, 250–8; Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 348, 352.
- [10] Liu Xiao, *Chushi sulian*, 15.
- [11] The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State (15 July 1948), *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), the Far East: China 1948, Vol. 7, 360–1.
- [12] The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State (1 December 1948), *FRUS*, the Far East: China 1948, Vol. 7, 625–7.
- [13] Mr. Chakravarty, after leaving China, relayed the contents of his meetings with the Soviet diplomat and prospects of Chinese situation to an American diplomat, Cloyce K. Huston,

stationed in Japan; Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Cloyce K. Huston, Counselor of Mission, Office of United States Political Advisor in Japan (8 January 1949), *FRUS*, the Far East: China 1949, Vol. 8, 24–5.

- [14] Stuart, *John Leighton Stuart's Diary*, 45.
- [15] Xue Xiantian, *Zhongsu guanxishi: 1945–1949*, 412.
- [16] Ledovsky, *SSSR i Stalin v sudbakh Kitaya*, 48–9.
- [17] History Department of Fudan University, *Zhongguo jindai duiwai guanxishi ziliao xuanji*, Vol. 2, 484–5.
- [18] ‘Telegramma I. V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 10 January 1949, in *Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF)*, Fond (F.) 45, Opis (Op.) 1, Delo (D.) 330, Listy (LI.) 95–6.
- [19] *Ibid.*
- [20] ‘Prodolzhenie I okonchanie predydushchei telegrammy I.V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 11 January 1949, in *APRF*, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 97–9.
- [21] ‘Zapiska A.I. Mikoyana v Prezidium TsK KPSS o poezdke v Kitai v yanvare-fevrale 1949 g’, 22 September 1960, in *APRF*, F. 3, Op. 65, D. 606, LI. 2–3.
- [22] Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguoyuanwen Fuyinjianhuibian*, 1381–2; *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF)*, Fond (F.) 100, Opis (Op.) 42, Papka (Pap.) 288, Delo (D.) 17, Listy (LI.) 3–5.
- [23] ‘Telegramma Mao Zeduna I.V. Stalinu’, 13 January 1949, in *APRF*, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 100–3.
- [24] The American withdrawal from consideration as a mediator surprised the USSR very much. The Soviet Union believed that the CCP purposely disclosed the information that the CCP and the USSR will not participate in peace talks, and therefore cause the diplomatic passiveness of the Soviet Union. Thus, in the Xibaipo meeting on 3 February, Mikoyan confronted Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders, saying: ‘We know that Britain, the United States and France would like to mediate between the KMT and CCP. Later I do not know how they found out that the Soviet Union and the CCP were against mediation of foreign countries. They did not want to lose face, so they changed their attitudes and refused to mediate. Therefore we must pay more attention to our secrecy-keeping, as we must notice whether there are unreliable people around the CCP who may hand over the information to the Americans.’ Facing Mikoyan’s interrogation, Mao Zedong bluntly answered that ‘Earlier, even before knowing about our attitudes, the British and American people reported publicly that the USSR and CCP will be against intermediation’. But Mikoyan did not accept Mao’s explanation and replied that ‘This was only their conjecture. However, it was after receiving the certain information on our attitudes that those western countries were hurry to turn down to mediate’. This documentation clearly shows that the USSR suspected that the CCP had disclosed the secret purposely. See Ledovsky, *SSSR i Stalin v sudbakh Kitaya*, 67; *APRF*, F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, LI. 47.
- [25] ‘Telegramma Mao Zeduna I.V. Stalinu’, 14 January 1949, in *APRF*, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 104–5.
- [26] ‘The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State (January 14, 1949)’, *FRUS*, the Far East: China 1949, Vol. 8, 47.
- [27] ‘The Ambassador in China to the Secretary of State (January 9, 1949)’, *FRUS*, the Far East: China 1949, Vol. 8, 25.
- [28] Eight conditions declared by CCP for peace talks were: 1. punishing war criminals; 2. abolishing current National Government constitution; 3. abolishing current law; 4. reorganising all the reactionary armies on the principle of democracy; 5. confiscating all bureaucratic capitals; 6. reforming the land system; 7. abolishing treasonous treaties; 8. holding a political consultative conference without any reactionaries and establishing a democratic united government, therefore taking over all the power of Nanjing Government as well as its

- affiliated institutions. See CCP Central Documentary Research Department, *Mao Zedong nianpu: 1893–1949*, Vol. 2, 435–6.
- [29] ‘Telegramma I. V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 14 January 1949, in APRE, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 110–3.
- [30] ‘Vrucheno A. Ya Vyshinskim Fu-Binchan’, 17 January 1949 in AVPRE, F. 100, Op. 42, Pap. 288, D. 17, LI. 7.
- [31] See CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, 78.
- [32] Ledovsky et al., *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, 411–2: ‘Telegramma I. V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 20 April 1948, in APRE, F. 39, Op. 1, D. 31, LI. 28–9.
- [33] ‘Zapiska A.I. Mikoyana v Prezidium TsK KPSS o poezdke v Kitai v yanvare-fevrale 1949 g’, 22 September 1960, in APRE, F. 3, Op. 65, D. 606, LI. 1–17.
- [34] Ibid.
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] ‘Telegramma I. V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 14 January 1949, in APRE, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 110–3.
- [37] Yu Zhan and Zhang Guangyou, ‘Guanyu sidalin cheng fou quanzu woguo dujiang de tansuo’, 56–8.
- [38] Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, 23–31.
- [39] Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 52.
- [40] While analysing the core of the United States’ foreign policies after World War II, Novikov stated that the United States had given up its isolation in a bid for world hegemony. For this goal the United States employed all diplomatic measures and made use of military forces as well as industrial and scientific power to force the USSR to make a series of compromises. Jensen, *Origins of the Cold War*, 7–10; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 103.
- [41] ‘Obstanovka v Kitae posle soveshchaniaya desiati compartii’, 23 January 1948, in Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniya i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii (RTsKhIDNI), F. 17, Op. 128, D. 1173, LI. 1–37.
- [42] ‘Kratkaya spravka k voprosu ob obstanovke v kitae’, 2 April 1948. AVPRE, F. 018, Op. 10, Pap. 24, D. 21, LI. 9–14.
- [43] ‘Amerikanskaya politika v Kitae v obstanovke voennogo porazhenia Gomindana’, 27 December 1948, in AVPRE, F. 100, Op. 42, Pap. 296, D. 117, LI. 7, 20, 23.
- [44] ‘Telegramma I. V. Stalina Mao Zedunu’, 14 January 1949, in APRE, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 330, LI. 110–3.
- [45] Concharov interview with Kovalev, 105.
- [46] Tao Wenzhao, *Zhongmei guanxishi: 1911–1950*, 456.
- [47] Nie Rongzhen, *Inside the Red Star*, 585; Nie Rongzhen, *Nie Rongzhen huiyilu*, Vol. 3, 679.
- [48] Author’s interview with Andrei Ledovsky. He had worked as first secretary at the embassy of Soviet Union to China in 1949.
- [49] APRE, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 346, LI. 13–23, 46; Bazhanov, *Aktualnye Problemy*, 37.
- [50] Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 2–3.
- [51] Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council, 14 April 1950, 16.
- [52] On the assistance of the United States to China during the Liberation War, see Tao Wenzhao, *Zhongmei guanxishi: 1911–1950*, 442–54.
- [53] Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian*, 412.
- [54] Report on Kim Il Sung’s visit to the USSR, 30 March–25 April 1950. Prepared by the International Department of the CC of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik). Cited in Bajanov and Bajanova, *The Korean Conflict, 1950–1953*.
- [55] August 1950, Stalin sent letter to Soviets Ambassador in Prague, conveying message to CSSR leader Klement Gottwald. This letter can be found in Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv

- Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii(RGASPI), F. 558, Op. 11, D. 62, LI. 71–2; Kim and Steuck, 'Did Stalin Lure the United States into the Korean War?'
- [56] This 'Neutrality Pact' not only violated China's territory sovereignty by recognising Japanese dominion over Manchuria, but also negatively influenced Chinese the anti-Japanese war. Li Jiagu, 'Suri zhongli tiaoyue'qianding de guoji beijing jiqi dui zhongsu guanxi de yingxiang', 88.
- [57] Yang Yunruo and Yang Kuisong, *Gongchan guiji he zhongguo geming*, 529–55.

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