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On the Korean War, 1950-53, and the Armistice Negotiations

I. [Background to and Preparations for First Stage of the War]

After separate elections in 1948 in South Korea and the formation of the puppet government of Rhee Syngman, on the one hand, and the formation of the DPRK, on the other, relations between the North and the South of the country were sharply aggravated. The Seoul regime, as well as the DPRK, declared its claim to be the authority in all of Korea. The situation at the 38th parallel became even more tense in 1948 after the withdrawal of Soviet and American troops from Korea.

During this period, Kim Il Sung and other Korean leaders were firmly determined to unify the country by military means, without devoting the necessary attention to studying the possibility that existed at that time for peaceful reunification through the broad development of the democratic movement in South Korea.

In the DPRK, a people's army was created which in manpower and equipment significantly surpassed the armed forces of South Korea. By January 1, 1950, the total number of DPRK troops was 110,000; new divisions were hastily being formed.^[1]

Calculating that the USA would not enter a war over South Korea, Kim Il Sung persistently pressed for agreement from Stalin and Mao Zedong to reunify the country by military means. (telegrams #4-51, 233, 1950)

Stalin at first treated the persistent appeals of Kim Il Sung with reserve, noting that "such a large affair in relation to South Korea ... needs much preparation," but he did not object in principle. The final agreement to support the plans of the Koreans was given by Stalin at the time of Kim Il Sung's visit to Moscow in March-April 1950. Following this, in May, Kim Il Sung visited Beijing and secured the support of Mao.

The Korean government envisioned realizing its goal in three stages:

- 1) concentration of troops near the 38th parallel
- 2) issuing an appeal to the South for peaceful unification
- 3) initiating military activity after the South's rejection of the proposal for peaceful unification.

At Stalin's order, all requests of the North Koreans for delivery of arms and equipment for the formation of additional units of the KPA [Korean People's Army] were quickly met. The Chinese leadership sent to Korea a division formed from Koreans who had been serving in the Chinese army, and promised to send food aid and to transfer one army closer to Korea "in case the Japanese enter on the side of South Korea." (telegram 362, 1950)

By the end of May 1950 the General Staff of the KPA together with Soviet military advisers announced the readiness of the Korean army to begin concentration at the 38th parallel. At the insistence of Kim Il Sung, the beginning of military activity was scheduled for June 25, 1950. (telegram 408, 1950)

By the time of the attack, the North Korean armed forces had significant superiority over the South Koreans. The correlation of forces between South and North Korea was as follows: in number of troops 1:2; number of guns 1:2; machine-guns 1:7; submachine guns, 1:13; tanks 1:6.5; planes 1:6. The operational plan of the KPA envisioned that Korean troops would advance 15-20 kilometers per day and would in the main complete military activity within 22-27 days. (telegram 468, 1950)

[Here follows a brief factual account of the course of the war through October 1950, from the initial successes of the KPA in June, July, and August, through their near defeat following the U.S./U.N. amphibious landing at Inchon in September- K.W.] During this period, which was an ordeal for the Korean people, the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party and the government of the DPRK worked strenuously on the formation of new military units, using the territory of China as well for this purpose. The most steadfast of the KPA units that were surrounded in the South carried on partisan combat in the mountains

II. Entry of the Chinese into the Korean War

During Kim Il Sung's visit to Beijing in May 1950, Mao Zedong, in conversation with him, underscored his conviction that the Americans would not become engaged in a war "for such a small territory as Korea" and stated that the Chinese government would transfer one of their armies to the region of Mukden in order to render the necessary assistance in case the South Koreans drew Japanese soldiers into military action. The Chinese leadership based their calculation on the fact that the American troops would not take part in the war, and they did not intend to aid the DPRK by means of the entrance of a large number of their troops.

In August 1950 American planes began bombing Chinese territory near the Yalu. In October 1950, soon after the American landing at Inchon, the front line moved close to the Korean-Chinese border and the enemy's artillery began to fire on Chinese territory. Ships of the American Seventh Fleet entered the Taiwan Straits.

By that time the Korean People's Army had virtually disintegrated as a fighting force. Remnants of military units that escaped encirclement were making their way toward China to regroup.

The Chinese government, under pressure from Stalin, adopted the decision to send volunteers to Korea only after a real threat to the security of China had arisen and the very existence of the DPRK had been called into question. The entry of Chinese volunteers into Korea began in the second half of October 1950. Subsequently, the total number of Chinese troops in Korea was brought to 1 million men; approximately the same number of men were sent to Korea to transport military cargo. (transmission of Soviet Embassy in Beijing #7, January 18, 1952) By the end of 1951, the strength of the Korean People's Army was brought to 337,000 men. On the other side, 700,000 officers and soldiers participated in ground operations, including 380,000 South Koreans and 280,000 American troops, not counting American naval and air forces, which blockaded Korea from the sea.

The entry of the Chinese volunteers into the war and the active participation of Soviet military advisers, who participated in the planning of all major offensive operations, brought about a vital breakthrough in the course of military events. American and South Korean troops were thrown back to the 38th parallel, and in several places even further southward. Chinese troops, operating on the Western front, occupied Seoul at the beginning of January 1951.

However, Chinese troops, following the strategic line of the leadership of the PRC to preserve the front at the 38th parallel (one may suppose that Mao Zedong was afraid of the consequences of a further advance to the south), left Seoul and withdrew to the north. They did not support the efforts of the Korean units on the eastern front to dislodge American troops from the area along the northern side of the 38th parallel.

During this period of the war, sharp disagreements arose between Kim Il Sung and the command of the Chinese people's volunteers, led by Peng Dehuai. The Koreans were against the surrender of Seoul by the Chinese volunteers and reproached them for not supporting the Korean units on the eastern front.

During the time that Chinese volunteers were in Korea there were numerous cases of Chinese interference in the internal affairs of the DPRK. Studying the morale of the Korean population, they sent reports to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party which underscored the poor conditions of the population and criticized the policies of the Korean authorities. The Chinese attempted to draw towards themselves the commanders of the KPA. Illustrative in this regard is the affair of Pak Il-u, chief representative of the KPA in the headquarters of the Chinese volunteers. Kim Il Sung more than once declared that Pak Il-u was behaving as the personal representative of Mao Zedong, trying to disparage the authority of the leadership of the Korean Worker's Party, placing himself above the party. The Chinese inflamed any sort of intrigue, using Pak Il-u against Kim Il Sung.

Peng Dehuai was not ashamed to express his low opinion of the military capabilities of Kim Il Sung. Cases of great power manners were observed, obvious scorn toward Koreans by Chinese commanders. Once Kim Il Sung was stopped by Chinese sentries when he went to Peng Dehuai's headquarters, and was detained by them for a long time. Local Korean authorities complained that the commanders of the Chinese volunteers frequently arbitrarily forced the population into construction work, indiscriminate felling of forests, slaughtering of livestock, etc.

Numerous Koreans lay the blame on China for the retreat of the KPA and its huge losses, declaring that "if the Chinese help had arrived a month earlier, everything would have turned out differently." Korean leaders said at that time that if it had not been for the Chinese position, it would have been possible to expel the Americans from the Korean peninsula and unify the whole country during the successful attack of the Chinese volunteers in the winter of 1950-51.

In all of this the Chinese volunteers, as is known, played an important role in the breakthrough in the military situation and in the retention of the front at the 38th parallel. Their losses for the first year of the Korean War alone were more than 300,000 men.

The Chinese leadership, making use of the volunteers' long stay in Korea, tried to strengthen their long-term influence in the DPRK. After the signing of the armistice in Korea on July 27, 1953, the Chinese volunteers remained in Korea for more than five years. It was the end of October 1958 before they returned to their homeland, under pressure from the Koreans.

The Chinese leaders even now, in every way possible, use the participation of the volunteers in the war in Korea to pressure the DPRK into supporting their adventuristic positions.

III. The U.N. and the Intervention of the USA in Korea [a brief straightforward summary-K.W.]

IV. Negotiations for the Armistice

By the middle of 1951, the situation clearly indicated that it was in practice impossible to resolve the unification of Korea by military means. Both the Chinese and the Korean leaders equally were forced to acknowledge this. After preliminary consultations with the Chinese and Koreans, the Soviet government on June 23, 1951, put forward a proposal for settling the military conflict in Korea. "As a first step," the Soviet representative declared, "it would be necessary to begin negotiations for a cease-fire, for an armistice with a mutual withdrawal of troops from the 38th parallel." This proposal attracted universal attention.

On June 27, 1951, the American Ambassador [to Moscow Alan G.] Kirk visited A.A. Gromyko (at that time deputy minister of foreign affairs of the USSR) and appealed to him with a number of questions in connection with these proposals. Elucidating to Kirk the position of the Soviet government, Comrade Gromyko indicated that the negotiations on the armistice must be conducted by representatives of the joint American command and the command of the South Korean troops, on one side, and by representatives of the command of the Korean People's Army and the command of the Chinese volunteers, on the other. Comrade Gromyko noted that the negotiations must be limited to military questions and first of all the question of a cease-fire.

On June 29, Ridgway, who was at that time the commander of the "U.N. troops" in Korea, appealed over the radio to the commander of the Korean People's Army Kim Il Sung with a proposal to begin negotiations for an armistice.

July 1, Kim Il Sung and Peng Dehuai broadcast over the radio a joint answer to Ridgway's appeal. The answer expressed their agreement to meet with representatives of the American command "to conduct negotiations for the cessation of military activity and the establishment of peace."

The negotiations of the representatives of the commands of the warring sides began on July 10, 1951, and continued, with breaks, for more than two years, until the end of July 1953.

In the course of the negotiations such basic questions were discussed as: the establishment of a line of demarcation between the two sides for the creation of a demilitarized zone as a condition for the cessation of military activity in Korea; the elaboration of practical measures for implementing the cease-fire and armistice in Korea, including the staff, authority and functions of an apparatus for observing the implementation of the conditions of the cease-fire and armistice.

By the beginning of May 1952, an agreement was reached on all questions, with the exception of the question regarding prisoners of war. Later that question was also resolved on a mutually acceptable basis.

Measures undertaken by the Soviet government after the death of Stalin in many ways facilitated the conclusion of the agreement. While in Moscow for Stalin's funeral, Zhou Enlai had conversations with Soviet leaders regarding the situation in Korea. During these conversations, Zhou Enlai, in the name of the government of the PRC, urgently proposed that the Soviet side assist the speeding up of the negotiations and the conclusion of an armistice. Such a position by the Chinese coincided with our position. For the implementation of practical measures ensuing from the complicated situation, a special representative was sent to Pyongyang from Moscow in March 1953 with a proposal for speeding up the peace negotiations. By that time the Koreans also showed a clear aspiration for the most rapid cessation of military activity.

On July 27 an armistice agreement was signed in Panmunjom.

The armistice agreement fixed the military demarcation line and provided for the withdrawal of troops 2 km from this line to create a demilitarized zone, [and] provided for a cease-fire and withdrawal of troops of both sides from the demilitarized zone within 72 hours after the armistice agreement takes effect. [Here follows a listing of the terms of the agreement—K.W.]

V. The Korean Question after the Armistice

The conclusion of the armistice in Korea created the preconditions for a peaceful reunification of the country. The first step in this direction must be the convening of the political conference envisioned in the agreement.

Because of the sabotage of the USA, a political conference on Korea was convened only on April 26, 1954, in Geneva. The American delegates applied maximum efforts to prevent the adoption of the proposals of the DPRK, USSR, and PRC that aimed to create on the Korean peninsula a single, genuinely democratic government. The conference did not adopt any constructive decisions on Korea.

The Korean question has remained until now within the framework of the U.N. and is considered unresolved. It is a subject of "discussion" at every regular session of the U.N. General Assembly. The government of the DPRK speaks out against the discussion of the so-called Korean question in the U.N. and in favor of

disbanding the “Commission on the Reunification and Restoration of Korea” and the withdrawal of American troops from Korea. This position of the Korean leadership is fully supported by the Soviet government.

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^[1] This figure is higher than the estimates of U.S. intelligence, according to which by June 25 the KPA numbered between 87,500 and 99,000 men. See the discussion of these figures in Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II*, 452-53.