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PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN POSSIBLE UN/US MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO THE KOREAN WAR



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



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PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN POSSIBLE
UN/US MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION WITH
RESPECT TO THE KOREAN WAR

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable military and political reactions of Communist China and the USSR to the following possible UN/US military courses of action with respect to the Korean war:

Course A — The UN/US to continue for the foreseeable future military pressure on the enemy at substantially the present level, while building up ROK forces, with a view to possible limited redeployment of US forces from Korea.

Course B — The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but increase military pressure on the enemy by stepping up ground operations while continuing aggressive air and naval action, with a view to making hostilities more costly to the enemy, in the hope that he might agree to an armistice acceptable to the US.

Course C — The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but continue aggressive air and naval action in Korea while launching a series of coordinated ground operations along the present line followed by a major offensive to establish a line at the waist of Korea, with a view to inflicting maximum destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea and to achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

Course D — The UN/US to extend and intensify military pressures on the enemy by stages, including air attack and naval blockade directly against Manchuria and Communist China, and, if required, increased ground operations in Korea, with a view to making hostilities so costly to the enemy that a favorable settlement of the Korean war might be achieved.

Course E — The UN/US to undertake a coordinated offensive to the waist of Korea, and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to inflicting maximum possible destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea consistent with establishing a line at the waist and to achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

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Course F — The UN/US to undertake a coordinated, large-scale offensive in Korea and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to the defeat and destruction of the bulk of the Communist forces in Korea and settlement of the Korean war on the basis of a unified, non-Communist Korea.

SCOPE

This estimate is directed toward the examination of probable Communist reactions to certain UN/US courses of action in Korea. Without prejudging current Communist over-

tures, which are still to a large degree ambiguous, it is assumed for the purpose of this estimate that the Communist proposals will not result in an armistice.

ESTIMATE

INTRODUCTION: RELATION OF KOREA TO OVER-ALL SOVIET AND CHINESE COMMUNIST OBJECTIVES

1. In order to achieve their over-all objective of weakening and destroying the Western Powers, as well as to consolidate, strengthen, and protect the bases of their power, the USSR and Communist China are united in their intention to expel the West from Asia. In Korea, they have appeared for the past year to be reconciled to the existing military stalemate, possibly estimating that the UN/US would eventually weary of the strain and that a solution could then be obtained leading ultimately to Communist control of all Korea.

2. We believe that the Communist objective eventually to gain control of all Korea will remain unchanged. We also believe, however, that the Communists desire to avoid general war over the Korean issue and that Communist courses of action in Korea will be determined by Communist global interests.¹

¹ The Director of Intelligence, USAF, believes that this paragraph should read as follows:

"We believe that the Communist objective eventually to gain control of all Korea will remain unchanged. We also believe that Communist China currently desires to limit hostilities with the UN/US forces to the Korean issue and that the USSR desires to avoid any expansion of hostilities which would put at risk fundamental strengths of the Soviet Union."

3. Communist reactions, political and military, to UN/US military initiatives in Korea will be conditioned by the following interests:

- a. Retention of substantially all Korean territory north of the 38th Parallel.
- b. Survival of a Communist regime in a substantial portion of North Korea.
- c. Maintenance of Communist military and political prestige.
- d. Security of Chinese Communist armed forces in the Korean theater.
- e. Security of the Manchurian industrial complex.
- f. Security of the Manchurian and Soviet borders.

4. If prior to the onset of any UN/US military course of action, the Communists recognized that they were faced with a clear choice between making the concessions necessary to reach an armistice, or accepting the likelihood that UN/US military operations would endanger the security of the Manchurian and Soviet borders, destroy the Manchurian industrial complex, or destroy the Chinese Communist armed forces, the Communists would probably agree to an armistice. However, it would be extremely difficult to present them with a clear choice of alternatives before such action was begun. Moreover, once such UN/US action was begun, Communist power and prestige would become further involved, thereby greatly increasing the difficulties of making the choice between agreeing to armistice or continuing the war.

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PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH DO NOT INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE WAR BEYOND KOREA

Course A — The UN/US to continue for the foreseeable future military pressure on the enemy at substantially the present level, while building up ROK forces, with a view to possible limited redeployment of US forces from Korea.

5. Communist China and the USSR would probably not be able initially to interpret the intent of the UN/US build-up for such a course of action. The Communists might consider that the UNC was either gradually building up for greatly intensified hostilities, or merely building up ROK strength so that the US could disengage its forces from Korea.

6. In any event, the Communists would almost certainly continue to build up their military strength in the Korea-Manchuria area,² and, once it became clear that the US was withdrawing forces, would probably seek to exert additional military pressure in Korea. The Communists would probably estimate that such a UN/US course of action would not threaten any of their principal interests in Korea, and therefore they would almost certainly not feel compelled thereby to make concessions to secure an armistice. Although the Communists may desire to force the US to continue to maintain the concentration of its forces in Korea, the Communists have other objectives, above all eventually to bring all of Korea under Communist control. The substitution of ROK for US forces might be regarded by the Communists as improving their chances for obtaining these other objectives.

7. Course A would probably have little or no immediate effect upon Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

Course B — The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but increase military pressure on the

enemy by stepping up ground operations while continuing aggressive air and naval action, with a view to making hostilities more costly to the enemy in the hope that he might agree to an armistice acceptable to the US.

Course C — The UN/US to maintain current restrictions on military operations but continue aggressive air and naval action in Korea while launching a series of coordinated ground operations along the present line followed by a major offensive to establish a line at the waist of Korea, with a view to inflicting maximum destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea and to achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

8. The Communists would probably not be able initially to interpret UN/US intention with regard to these alternative courses of action. They would probably base their estimate on the size and composition of the UN/US build-up for these intensified military operations and on the degree of mobilization within the US. Unless there were a marked reinforcement of UN/US forces in Korea, the Communists would probably estimate that the UN/US strength and determination for these proposed alternatives would not be great enough to sustain military operations which would seriously threaten their principal interests in the Korean theater.

9. The initial Communist reaction, once such military operations had begun, would be to counter vigorously. The Chinese Communists would make a maximum ground defense effort against these UNC operations, and would also launch strong counteroffensives. They would make a maximum air defense effort over Communist-held territory and would probably launch air strikes against UNC amphibious operations. We have no basis for determining whether during the first phases of the action, the Communists would or would not commit the Communist Air Force in China (CAFIC)³ to large-scale oper-

² See NIE-80, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea through 1953," dated 3 April 1953, for a discussion of Communist military capabilities in Korea.

³ The term CAFIC is meant to include North Korean air units and Soviet units which are believed to be operating with the Chinese Communists.

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ations over UN-held territory. They almost certainly would not commit Soviet ground forces in Korea or Soviet air forces over UN-held territory. We believe that the Communists would accept substantial losses of men and materiel in countering or containing these UNC operations. We are unable to estimate whether such losses, however great, would in themselves induce the Communists to seek an armistice.

10. If UN forces launched a general offensive, as contemplated in Course C, the Communists would probably estimate that the UN/US was determined to drive the Communist forces from all Korea. If the Communists estimated that they would be unable to halt the UN advance without expanding the war, they might accept the risks of general war involved by committing their air force unreservedly over UN-held territory or even introducing Soviet ground units to stiffen the Communist defense. Before accepting these risks, however, they would probably attempt to secure an armistice which would leave a substantial part of North Korea in Communist hands.

11. If, on the other hand, the Communists retreated without expanding the war or seeking an armistice, and UN/US forces halted at the waist, the Communists probably would reconstitute their forces and continue the war.

12. Courses B and C would probably not affect Sino-Soviet cooperation in Korea.

PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO UN/US COURSES OF ACTION WHICH INVOLVE EXPANSION OF THE KOREAN WAR

Course D — If the UN/US were to extend and intensify military pressures on the enemy by stages, including air attack and naval blockade directly against Manchuria and Communist China, and, if required, increased ground operations in Korea, with a view to making hostilities so costly to the enemy that a favorable settlement of the Korean war might be achieved.

Course E — If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated offensive to the waist of Korea, and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to inflicting maximum possible destruction of enemy forces and materiel in Korea consistent with establishing a line at the waist and to achieving a favorable settlement of the Korean war.

Course F — If the UN/US were to undertake a coordinated, large-scale offensive in Korea and a naval blockade and air and naval attacks directly against Manchuria and Communist China, with a view to the defeat and destruction of the bulk of the Communist forces in Korea and settlement of the Korean war on the basis of a unified, non-Communist Korea.

13. If, prior to actual initiation of such military operations, the Communists should become convinced that the strength and determination of the UN powers were sufficient to endanger their principal interests in the Korean theater, and that these dangers could not be averted without serious risk of a general war, they would probably make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice.

14. If, as a result of Communist miscalculation of UN/US capabilities and intentions, or because the Communists were not willing to make the compromises necessary to obtain an armistice, the war were expanded to Manchuria and China proper, the Communists would almost certainly assume, particularly if UN ground forces launched large-scale attacks in Korea, that the UN/US was prepared to accept great risks in order to drive the Communists from Korea. The Communists would almost certainly assume that any UNC air attacks against Manchuria or China proper would sooner or later include air attacks against their Chinese Communist industrial complex.

15. We believe that in response to the initiation of any of these courses of action, the Communists would offer maximum resistance, including greatly increased Soviet participation in the air defense of Manchuria and

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China proper and CAFIC attacks on UN forces and bases in the Far East. So long as they estimated that they would be able to maintain the security of their forces in Korea, inflict serious losses on the UN air forces attacking China and Manchuria, and protect Manchurian industry, we believe the Communists would not be willing to sacrifice any of their important interests in Korea in order to obtain an armistice.⁴ Under these circumstances, their unwillingness to compromise their position in Korea would be strengthened if their political and psychological countermeasures appeared to have the effect of significantly reducing UN and/or US determination to sustain an expanded war in the Far East.

16. If, however, in the implementation of any of the above courses of action, the Communists were unable to counter UN/US air operations against Manchuria and if it appeared to the Communists that the Manchurian industrial complex were threatened with destruction, we believe that the Communists would be willing to sacrifice some of their interests in Korea in order to obtain a cessation of hostilities. If simultaneously with air attacks on Manchuria and China proper, UN/US forces were advancing in North Korea, the Communists, while seeking to negotiate an armistice that secured continued Communist control over a substantial portion of

North Korea, might commit Soviet air units over UN-held territory and might introduce Soviet ground forces into Korea. The USSR would, in any event, leave to the UN/US the responsibility for recognizing the commitment of Soviet forces as a *casus belli*.

17. Although we believe these UN/US courses of action would impose strains on Sino-Soviet relations, we do not believe that these courses of action would cause the Chinese Communist leadership to alter basically its alignment with the USSR.

EMPLOYMENT OF ATOMIC WEAPONS

18. We believe that if atomic weapons were employed by UN/US forces in any of the above alternative courses of action, the Communists would recognize the employment of these weapons as indicative of Western determination to carry the Korean war to a successful conclusion. We are unable to estimate whether this recognition would by itself lead the Communists to make the concessions necessary to reach an armistice. We believe that the Communist reaction would be in large part determined by the extent of damage inflicted.

NON-PARTICIPATION OF UN POWERS

19. If UN powers refused to participate in these courses of action, the Communists would be encouraged to resist in the hope of further straining US relations with its western allies and in the hope that US determination to sustain the war alone would falter. The Communists would also feel that the risks of general war would be lessened and therefore they might be less restrained in their military reactions against US operations.

⁴SE-37, "Probable Effects on the Soviet Bloc of Certain Courses of Action Directed at the Internal and External Commerce of Communist China," dated 9 March 1953, concludes that a large-scale and sustained air and naval bombardment of key Chinese Communist transportation lines, in conjunction with a naval blockade, would not in itself induce the Communists to accept a Korean settlement on UN terms.

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