

Goncharov, Sergei N., John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai. *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

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Goncharov, Sergei N., John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai. *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

The Korean War as an area of scholarly interest has been sufficiently explored with voluminous published works available to the public. The current volume is unique because it is the cooperative effort of three scholars researching the primary source materials of Russian, Chinese, and Korean origins. Changing political situations in the former Soviet Union and China have made it possible for such joint scholarly research.

This work is broader in scope than its title suggests. It begins with a careful analysis of Soviet-Chinese communist relations during the Chinese Civil War (1945-49), with focus on the intricate relations between Stalin and Mao. It then moves on to the negotiations leading up to the conclusion of the Sino-Soviet Alliance (February 1950). Although these developments constituted crucial background to the Korean situation, only the last one third of the work is devoted exclusively to the origin of the Korean War.

While not refuting or denying other contributing factors affecting Sino-Soviet relations, the authors of this book have concentrated on one main theme. In their own words, "the history of the Sino-Soviet relationship was above all the product of competing security concepts and national interests and was dominated by the strategic designs and political acuity of Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin." This theme is succinctly and insightfully analyzed and maintained throughout the book.

Stalin had steadfastly maintained a global strategy in viewing Soviet-Chinese relations. Europe was the strategic centre and would be the site of a decisive war yet to come between the USSR and the imperialist powers. However, the formation of the NATO in April 1949, placed the Soviet position on the defensive. With the triumph of the communists in China, Stalin recognized new opportunities in Asia. A revolutionary offensive led by China would divert US attention away from Europe and could sap American strength. The strategic importance of China lay in this global setting. Stalin was prepared to offer aid and accord preeminent position to Mao in Asia in exchange for the Chinese alliance. Furthermore, in pursuance of this policy, Stalin could drive a wedge between China and the US, thus preventing any possible trend toward "Titoism" in Mao. In the view of the authors, this was one of the major reasons for Stalin's consent to Kim Il-sung's "venture," aside from the Soviet desire to create a greater security buffer zone and to use the peninsula as the springboard for future operations against Japan.

Stalin was shrewd enough not to give free rein to China. The Soviet aid package had strings attached which were damaging to China's sovereign rights. As stipulated in the terms of the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty, the Soviet Union was obliged to come to China's assistance only when a formally declared war existed. Stalin would only fight a war at a time and place of his own choice.

Mao was equally shrewd in his assessment of the situation and in his hard bargaining with the Soviet side about the content of the alliance treaty. As an intense nationalist, Mao was sensitive to issues concerning China's sovereignty and independence. However, he was fully aware of the weakness of China's position. China in 1949-50 had very few chips for bargaining, and was badly in need of aid from the only source available, the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the alliance treaty, particularly the Additional Agreement (a secret protocol prohibiting third country presence in Manchuria and Xinjiang), was a bitter pill for Mao to swallow. For Mao and other Chinese communist leaders, it was the longterm gains from the Soviet alliance that prevailed.

As the leader of the Asian revolution, Mao could not deny the Korean desire to reunify their country, which explains Mao's endorsement of the Kim Il-sung venture. With reference to China's intervention in the war in November 1950, the authors suggest that the crossing of the 38th parallel by the American forces was not necessarily the determining factor. China's decision to enter the war was made before the crossing, when Kim's forces began to suffer serious setbacks. Evidence seems to suggest that the night when Mao pondered about the decision, it was the "longest night" in Mao's life. The authors, however, fall short of offering any comment on whether such a decision was a blunder made by Mao and a serious mistake on the part of China.

This study made use of a profuse amount of Russian and Chinese source material only recently made

available to researchers. Of particular importance from the Russian sources were documents from the personal archive of I.V. Kovalev, who was Stalin's confidant in China during the crucial years of the late 1940s. Among the Chinese sources the most important were Mao's recently published manuscripts and the memoirs of Shi Zhe, Mao's secretary and Russian interpreter in 1949-50. Published materials are supplemented by a wide range of interviews carried out by all three authors. Relatively weak are sources from the Koreans, due obviously to the political situation still existing in North Korea.

This is a scholarly study of high quality, an impressive work of diplomatic history dealing with an important yet difficult and complicated topic. It will remain an authoritative text on Sino-Soviet relations of the 1945-50 period for years to come.

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